

**as long as i'm here**

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/29893992) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/29893992>.

Rating:	<a href="#">Teen And Up Audiences</a>
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Characters:	<a href="#">TommyInnit (Video Blogging RPF)</a> , <a href="#">Technoblade (Video Blogging RPF)</a> , <a href="#">Toby Smith   Tubbo</a> , <a href="#">Phil Watson (Video Blogging RPF)</a> , <a href="#">Wilbur Soot (mentioned)</a> , <a href="#">Jschlatt (Video Blogging RPF)</a> , <a href="#">Ranboo (Video Blogging RPF)</a> , <a href="#">Clay   Dream (Video Blogging RPF)</a> , <a href="#">Connor   ConnorEatsPants</a> , <a href="#">Luke   Punz</a>
Additional Tags:	<a href="#">Mentioned Dream SMP Ensemble</a> , <a href="#">Implied/Referenced Child Abuse</a> , <a href="#">Past Child Abuse</a> , <a href="#">Child Abuse</a> , <a href="#">Tommy had a really bad time</a> , <a href="#">Angst and Hurt/Comfort</a> , <a href="#">Angst</a> , <a href="#">Hurt/Comfort</a> , <a href="#">Alternate Universe</a> , <a href="#">Alternate Universe - Modern Setting</a> , <a href="#">I really miss bedrock bros</a> , <a href="#">Health Issues</a> , <a href="#">it gets darker the further it goes</a> , <a href="#">sorry if you thought the sequel was going to be happy</a> , <a href="#">it's not</a> , <a href="#">(dont mind me casually updating the tags as the fic goes along)</a> , <a href="#">Emotional Manipulation</a>
Language:	English
Series:	Part 3 of <a href="#">one hundred miles</a>
Collections:	<a href="#">best smp stories</a> , <a href="#">Completed stories I've read</a> , <a href="#">Found family to make me feel something</a> , <a href="#">sob i love these fics sm</a> , <a href="#">favourite books ive read on here</a> , <a href="#">big cry fics</a> , <a href="#">thinksmoon's collection of best sbi fics</a> , <a href="#">All fics I've read (mcyt)</a> , <a href="#">Best Works</a> , <a href="#">SleepyBois Fics that I like &lt;3</a> , <a href="#">moth's fanfic recommendations</a> , <a href="#">fanfics that hurt me but i love them (authors should pay for my therapy)</a> , <a href="#">Phil's the kind of a guy to look at the child and ask "Is anyone gonna adopt them?" and not wait for an answer</a> , <a href="#">💎*. fics so perfect that they change the definition of perfection (๑'۰'๑) 💎*</a> , <a href="#">mcyt fanfic library &lt;3</a> , <a href="#">Yes, books??? yes!!!!</a> , <a href="#">Sad boy Tommy hours</a> , <a href="#">kaislosermoment</a> , <a href="#">finished fics i've read</a> , <a href="#">amazing fanfic</a>
Stats:	Published: 2021-03-07 Completed: 2021-04-15 Words: 59,420 Chapters: 14/14

# as long as i'm here

by [No\\_one\\_you\\_know](#)

## Summary

“I don’t want to go to school. You can’t make me.”

“You’ve already missed two months-”

“Then I’ll fail freshman year and redo it next year.”

“You’re going.” A pile of papers sat in front of Technoblade. Grading, he had said.

Apparently he had foregone all of it while setting up Tommy’s room, and was still struggling to catch up on it now. He looked stressed. Which is why Tommy thought it was the perfect time to pester him.

“I’m not. You’ll drop me off at school and I’ll leave as soon as you drive away.”

Healing isn't linear. Tommy still has trauma from living with Dream, and the longer he stays with Technoblade, the clearer it is to see.

## Notes

This is a sequel!! Technically you could read it on your own, but it'll make a lot more sense if you read the first book "that's, like, a hundred miles" first.

Warnings for mentions of child abuse and all the other stuff that came in the first book.

I took 2 weeks to write the last chapter of hundred miles, and 2 days to write this. yeah, that makes sense.

## like a pack mule

Tommy was getting on Technoblade's last nerve. He would love to say that it wasn't on purpose, but it was.

He had been there for a week and Techno hadn't punished him once. Sure, Techno hadn't done that last time, either, but that was because Techno had (by legal standards) kidnapped him. But now Techno didn't have an excuse not to do anything, so... Why wasn't he?

The position Tommy was lying in was less than comfortable. Upside down over the back of the couch, his feet dangerously close to Technoblade's head.

"I don't want to go to school. You can't make me."

"You've already missed two months-"

"Then I'll fail freshman year and redo it next year."

"You're not failing freshman year. What I was *going* to say was that you can't miss any *more* school."

"I'm not going." He got off the couch. Er, rolled off the couch, just barely managing to not hit Techno with his cast on the way down. Since his crutches were now on the other side of the couch, he decided to just sit in a criss-cross position on the floor instead.

"You're going." A pile of papers sat in front of Technoblade. Grading, he had said. Apparently he had foregone all of it when setting up Tommy's room, and was still struggling to catch up on it now. He looked stressed. Which is why Tommy thought it was the perfect time to pester him.

"I'm not. You'll drop me off at school and I'll leave as soon as you drive away."

Techno sighed. He set the papers to the side, muttering something about investing in a coffee table, and took off his glasses.

Now they were getting somewhere.

“I’ll do it. I’ve skipped school before.” Tommy continued. Sure, the last time he had ditched school was when he was nine. He would never admit it, but he cried afterwards, worried that it would disappoint Wilbur. Instead, his brother just ruffled his hair and told him to not make it a habit.

“Thomas Watson, you are not skipping school.”

Tommy had to force himself not to flinch at the use of his full-ish name. Usually Techno flip-flopped between calling him Tommy and Theseus, but Thomas?

He didn’t remember what the use of Thomas meant.

When Wilbur called him Thomas, it meant he was going to be lectured. When Dream used it, it meant he was going to be punished. But Techno? He had no idea what Techno using the name would bring.

“I mean, I don’t really think it’s up to you.” Why did he keep pushing the argument? He would never do something like this with Dream. Then again, he didn’t need to. He already knew all of Dream’s rules and punishments. Technoblade, on the other hand, was a closed book. A closed book that Tommy desperately needed to open.

“I’ll get Tubbo to watch you and report to me. Like a spy.”

That made Tommy hesitate. “I’m going to Tubbo’s school?” No, wait, stay on task. “I don’t care. I’m still not going.”

“*Thomas.*” Techno was glaring at him now. Good. Well, maybe not good.

Tommy swore he was having heart palpitations. Despite being an english major with pink hair, Technoblade was *scary*. Wilbur’s face was soft and kind, but Techno’s had an edge to it. His eyes were always more squinted, too, like he was silently judging everything. He probably was.

He probably was judging Tommy, actually.

Tommy shifted in his position, moving up to his knees to be (somewhat) more level with Techno. “*Technoblade.*” He tried to send back the same glare.

“You’re going to school.” His voice was firmer now. Sharper, like his face.

“I’m not.”

“This conversation is pointless,” He was getting more annoyed, it was so clear to tell, “And in the end, it doesn’t matter. You’re going to school regardless.”

“Oh? And what if I don’t?” Tommy challenged, moving slightly closer into Techno’s personal space.

He wasn’t sure where he went wrong, because the glare melted off Techno’s face and was immediately replaced with concern.

“What do you think I’m going to do, Theseus?” Tommy had heard his middle name more in the last week than he had in his entire life. He hated it.

“I don’t know, Technoblade.” Tommy groaned. “What *are* you going to do?” His voice had a nervous edge to it now, which he hated. That wasn’t what he wanted, he wanted to sound... Well, annoying. Like an annoying kid. It should have been easy, since he *was* an annoying kid.

“I... I’m not going to hurt you. You know that, right?” The edge of his voice had melted into a soft concern.

Did Tommy know that? Deep down, maybe. Did he believe it? Not for a second.

He just wanted to get it over with. It had taken Dream three days before he slapped him, and it slowly got worse from there, but at least Tommy knew what those punishments were like. How much they would hurt (for the most part).

In Technoblade’s home, however? Tommy had no *idea* what was coming to him. He just wanted Techno to hit him already, just so Tommy could gauge if it would be worth it to act out, how many rules he could break. He had already broken several, he was sure, but he hadn’t been hit yet, so what was Techno waiting for?

Maybe the same thing Dream would wait for?

“CPS only comes once a year, you know. And they, like, *just* visited. You have time.”

It was supposed to be reassuring, at least somewhat. But instead Techno looked... He looked horrified. Tommy wanted to move back, apologize for his mistakes, but he stayed firm. Horror could lead to a punishment, too, right?

“You don’t... Tell me that Dream didn’t tell you that. Tell me that wasn’t the only reason he wouldn’t always hit you.”

Tommy’s eyes darted around the apartment for a moment, unsure of how to respond. What would make Techno most mad? Telling him that Dream did all that, surely. But that would also be bad-mouthing Dream, which he most definitely did *not* want to do. “I’m just saying.

Nobody would even know.” He paused, then added, “Especially since I’m not going to go to school.”

“Theseus... Theseus, look at me.” He did so. “I am *never* going to hit you. Okay? I’m not going to lock you in your room, I’m not going to stop feeding you just because you did something ‘wrong’.” Techno wasn’t lying, especially about that last one. Tommy hated it. Since he moved in, Techno had been forcing Tommy to eat at least two meals a day, and that felt like way too much most of the time. “You... You’re safe here. You know that, right? No one’s going to hurt you anymore. Not as long as I’m here.”

Tommy had gotten into a fight with someone at school when he was younger. Some kid, his age, though much taller than him. He hadn’t stood a chance, even though when he came home he lied and told Wilbur he had totally won the fight.

Wilbur had patched him up afterwards. He had ruffled his hair, and had told him those same words.

That no one was going to hurt Tommy. That he was here.

The funny thing about twins is that they have the same voice.

Tommy’s heart was racing, because for a second Techno was Wilbur, but it wasn’t Wilbur because Wilbur was *dead*, and Tommy knew he was dead. Wilbur had died four years ago. Wilbur was gone. Wilbur was not here to comfort him.

Tears he could barely feel slipped from the corners of his eyes.

“Can I go to my room?” He asked, more quietly than he had spoken the entire day. His hands were shaking and he could barely breathe.

Techno just looked confused. Of course he did. “Of course, yeah.”

Tommy had pushed himself to his feet, awkwardly balancing on one foot before Techno handed him the crutches. It was embarrassing, honestly, because he didn’t need Techno’s help. He didn’t need anyone’s help. He was a big man. Besides, he could walk with the cast, if he really tried.

He had been told not to do that countless times in the last few days. But sometimes it was easier than dealing with crutches.

“Do you want to be alone?” W- Technoblade asked.

Tommy nodded, almost too quickly.

He limped off to his room before Techno could ask anything else, practically slamming the door behind him.

Dream would have screamed at him for slamming the door. Dream wasn't here anymore, though. This wasn't Tommy's old room.

And Tommy was okay with that. Not that his old room was bad, because he was incredibly grateful for it. It was a very nice thing for Dream to give him, but...

His new room was admittedly average-sized, but he didn't mind at all. It had soft carpet floors, and the walls were painted a light grey (though Techno said they could repaint it to a fun color at a later date). There was a desk pushed into one corner of the room, with a lamp, Tommy's backpack, and a whole mess of other things piled on top of it. On the opposite side of the room was Tommy's bed; a twin-sized mattress with blue pillowcases and a mis-match of several blankets thrown over top.

A dresser was placed next to his bed, filled with clothes that Techno and Puffy had bought him while he was away. On top of the dresser sat the nerf gun and a few various knickknacks Tubbo had brought him, as well as the stuffed bee Phil had gotten him when he was a kid, and a CD player he had yet to use.

Finally, on the walls of the room, were two posters, one of Mario Kart, and one of Minecraft, a game Tommy had never played. Okay, technically it was wrong to say there were *only* two posters, because Tubbo and him had made several hand-drawn pictures and hung them up. They were messy scribbles, one labeled “big law” with a drawing that vaguely resembled Tubbo as a judge, another with a drawing of a moth labeled ‘Clementine’.

The whole room was unfamiliar, but not unwanted. It was nice, in a weird way that Tommy hadn't expected. He couldn't remember the last time he had owned so many things.

He flopped down on the bed, ignoring the dull ‘thud’ of the crutches landing on the carpet. He was grateful for them, he really was, but *geez* were they a pain to use.

It didn’t take long, maybe thirty minutes, tops, for there to be a quiet knock on the door. At least, Tommy had thought it hadn’t been long, but a glance up at the clock as he pushed himself up to a sitting position confirmed it had been at least thirty minutes.

“Hello?” Tommy groaned, tossing his gaze to the door.

“Tommy? Can I come in?” It was a question, but Tommy knew there wasn’t a choice. Wilbur- Dream- Technoblade would come in, anyway. Still, it was rude not to at least humor him.

“Sure, big man.” The door creaked open, and in stepped Technoblade. “What’s up?”

“Can I sit?” Techno asked, gesturing to the chair at Tommy’s desk.

Tommy nodded in response. He watched as Techno made his way over and sat down.

“We need to talk about what happened earlier.”

“I really don’t think we do, actually.”

“Tommy,” Techno’s voice was warning.

And suddenly all the want Tommy had earlier was gone. He didn’t want to be hurt, not really. Any calming familiarity that would come with it was overshadowed by the terror that came from the idea of being struck by Technoblade.

Dream had still had a plaster over the bridge of his nose during the trial. Techno had said he had punched him. Surely, Techno wouldn’t go so far to break bones for the very first punishment, but the knowledge that he *could* scared Tommy despite himself.

Techno cut through the fear. “You look like you’re spacing out a little bit. Can you- are you with me still? Can you breathe for me?”

“I’m fine. What do you want?”

“Theseus, look at me for a moment.”



Tommy wanted nothing more than to yell at Techno for calling him that. He wanted to glare pointedly at the floor and not move his gaze. Instead, he looked up at his brother, who just kept talking.

“What Dream did to you was wrong. Do you understand that?”

“I...” No, he didn’t. He didn’t understand at all. “Of course I do. I’m not stupid.”

“Tommy, there’s no circumstance in which an adult should hit you. Ever.”

What Techno was saying made sense. It did, it really did, but at the same time the thought made his head spin. Because Dream was a good person, a good guardian. The only one who wanted him. He would never-

The crutches lay on the floor next to the bed. Crutches he had because of Dream. Because of the ankle that Dream broke. Tommy could remember how horrified everyone looked when telling that story, and even when it was happening, Tommy knew it was wrong, but...

He didn’t know. It was weird. It was confusing.

But he was fourteen. He was old enough that he should understand it. So he nodded to what Techno was saying instead of voicing his confusion.

“Honestly, I doubt I’m ever even going to ground you.”

“Really? But I’m a rebellious teenager.”

“First of all, you’re a child-”

“I am four-*teen*, thank you very much.”

“A *child*.” Techno repeated. The corners of his mouth tugged upwards, just slightly.

“A rebellious teen. I could sneak out at any moment to go do drugs.”

“You wouldn’t know where to find drugs, Tommy.”

“Sure I would. I’d ask Tubbo.”

Techno laughed at that. “You think *Tubbo* knows where to find drugs?”

Tommy couldn’t help but laugh, too.

Maybe he didn't need to push for punishments. They would come, of course, they always did. But they could come at their own time. Because, for now, Tommy much preferred the comfort that came from getting along.

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Tommy must have lost the battle for school, because the next morning, Techno was waking him up bright and early, telling him to get up and get ready for classes.

Tommy ate a bowl of cereal at Techno's request. He wasn't hungry at all, insisting that he'd be fine until dinner, but Techno had insisted, and since the night before, Tommy had switched his method from actively pursuing punishment to avoiding it.

"I wish I could take you to school for your first day." Techno sat across the table from him, also eating cereal, but the boring grown-up stuff Tommy hated. At least Techno would buy him the good sugary cereal instead.

"It's not really a first day, is it?" He mumbled through a spoonful, "I'm weeks too late for that."

"It's *your* first day. You still have to do all the first day things, don't you? Get your schedule and stuff?"

Tommy shrugged. "I don't know if it's the same in highschool as it was in fifth grade." It was strange to think that the moment his entire life changed was four whole years ago. Four years since Wilbur died. Four years since Dream took Tommy in. Four years since Tommy moved to a new state and had to frantically try to catch up in school.

"No matter, Tubbo said he'd love to help you. I told you Schlatt was driving you two, didn't I?"

"We can't walk?" Tommy had never lived far enough away from school to need a bus or even a car ride.

Techno stared at him, incredulously.

Tommy stared back, before it clicked.

He had a broken ankle. Techno had turned out to be overprotective. Even though Tommy could walk just fine (though his armpits had gotten a little bruised in the last few days due to the crutches), of course he wasn't allowed to walk to school.

"It's too far to walk, anyway. Schlatt said he could take you two for the first week, and then you'll take the bus after that."

"Isn't Schlatt some business guy? Shouldn't he be at work?"

Techno just shrugged. "He said he could come in late and wouldn't get in trouble"

"Techno?"

"Yeah?"

"Do I really have to go?"

"Yeah, you do." Techno sighed. He didn't sound disappointed, just tired.

Techno had looked tired for as long as Tommy could remember, but he looked more tired now. Like it was deeper, somehow. Tommy wondered if it was his fault- if all the adoption stuff was stressing him out. Tommy tried to be good (for the most part), but maybe it wasn't enough.

"I have to go to work, you know. I can't just leave you home alone."

"You could, actually. I'm a big man."

"Fourteen." Techno retorted.

"Practically an adult."

"*Fourteen.*"

"Dream left me home alone all the time." Sometimes he forgot that Techno didn't think Dream was the best example of a good guardian. What was a good example? "Wilbur would, too, sometimes."

"Wilbur left you home alone? You were, like, six." He sounded taken aback.

Tommy shrugged. "I was *seven*. And he only did it when he had to go to meetings."

Techno's face scrunched up a little at that. "What meetings?"

Oops.

Tommy wasn't supposed to say.

Wilbur... He wasn't an alcoholic. Tommy hadn't even known what that word meant at the time, though he learned later on. At the time, Tommy didn't even know Wilbur was addicted to anything. Looking back, however, and remembering how his hands would shake and how he'd leave every few hours to go smoke, it was painfully obvious.

Wilbur started to go to Alcoholics Anonymous meetings a year after they moved out. He didn't call them that at the time. Tommy couldn't remember what Wilbur referred to them as, actually, and the thought made his heart hurt, because he couldn't *already* be forgetting things. It was too soon, he couldn't lose the memory of his brother yet. No way.

What he *did* remember, however, was how Wilbur took him into his room after the first meeting. How Wilbur sat him onto his bed and talked about how he was starting a twelve-step program.

He remembered Wilbur making him put a hand to his chest and made him swear on his life that he wouldn't tell anyone about them. Not his teachers, not his school friends, not Techno.

Even if it felt silly now, unimportant, even, Tommy was going to keep that promise.

"Oh, you know. For work stuff."

"I wasn't aware he was involved in meetings for work."

"He... Uh, he was trying to get a promotion. Thought it would help. It didn't." He vaguely recalled Wilbur talking about a promotion once. He had been so disappointed when he hadn't gotten it. Tommy pretended to not hear the angry shouting from the balcony after he was supposed to be asleep.

"Are you sure that was it? Wilbur never told me about going to meetings to get the promotion."

"Well he didn't want to tell you. Didn't... Uh... Want to look over-eager."

“You’re definitely not using that word right.”

“Didn’t want to look... Um...” Tommy paused, thinking. “Bad.” Easy. Maybe this literature thing wasn’t so hard after all.

“Bad?” Techno repeated, raising an eyebrow.

“You know, he wanted to impress you, I think. So he didn’t tell you about the meetings.” Tommy sounded unsure, even to himself. This conversation was *not* going so well.

“Really? Because Wilbur told me everything.” He could see Techno’s expression falter as he started to think about his brother. He did that a lot, Tommy noticed.

“Yeah but he didn’t want to embarrass himself, you know? You got out of college and immediately became this super cool English professor. Wil had to-”

He stopped as he heard the quiet rapping of someone’s hand on the front door.

Tubbo. What a godsend. Because Tommy had just been digging this hole deeper the more he talked, and now he had an excuse to leave. Even if that excuse was that he had to go to school.

“That’s my ride.” Tommy pushed his chair back and stood, nearly toppling over as he tried to balance. He grabbed the crutches and tucked them underneath his arms once again.

“Do you have everything you need? Books, notebooks, pencils, paper, calculator-”

“I’ve got it all.” He pulled his backpack off the back of the chair and held it up for Techno to see. The backpack that used to hold all his important belongings now was filled to the brim with school supplies Techno had gotten him. All his important belongings were stashed around Tommy’s room in different hiding spots, places he was sure Techno wouldn’t look.

Tubbo was still knocking. He would do that, just tap his knuckles against the door until someone answered. It could get annoying sometimes, but Tommy personally found it endearing. Er, no, it was clingy, but he put up with it. Yeah, that’s how it was.

It was a challenge to get the backpack on after he already had crutches tucked under his arms. While he struggled with that, Techno got up to let Tubbo in.

“Tommy!” Was his friends immediate shout, as he rushed over to greet Tommy. The day after Tommy officially moved in, he explained to Tubbo that his name was actually Tommy, and he had just panicked when they had first met. Tubbo didn’t care, only asking what name Tommy preferred to go by. He told him it didn’t matter. Now, Tubbo switched back and forth between the names rapid-fire.

“Tubbo!” Tommy shouted back. He’d managed to get one backpack strap on without dropping the crutches, now he just had to-

Tubbo slipped the strap off of Tommy’s shoulder, pulling the bag out of his hands.

“I’ll carry your stuff, don’t worry.”

“Like a pack mule.”

“Well if you’re going to be rude about it-”

“No, Tubbo!” Tommy shouted in mock-despair. “I’m sorry!”

Tubbo snorted, swinging the backpack easily over his own shoulder. Show-off. Tommy couldn’t wait to get his cast off. “Are you ready to go?”

“Ready as I’ll ever be.”

“Great. Schlatt’s already waiting in the car.”

Tommy was just a little wary of Schlatt. Not him as a person so much as his driving skills. Granted, he’d never seen the man drive, but judging by his personality, he thought he would be an awful driver.

“Great.” Tommy replied. They made it halfway out the door before Tommy remembered-

He was supposed to say when he was leaving. To be polite about it. To tell Dream goodbye, where he was going, and when he would be back.

Not Dream. Not Dream. Technoblade. Techno already knew where he was going (school) and when he’d be back (around three-thirty-ish). So, instead, Tommy turned back.

“Bye, Techno. I’ll see you later, I guess?”

Techno nodded. "Have a good day at school. And if you need anything, call me, okay?"

Tommy didn't have a phone. "Okay."

And then they were off. It was going great until they got to the stairs. Four flights of stairs was usually no big deal, but considering Tommy was still very inexperienced with crutches, it was a little bit of a big deal.

"Want me to carry you?"

"Do *not* carry me, you prick!"

Tubbo snorted. "I'm just saying it'd be faster. I could totally carry you."

"Could not."

"Could, too."

"You're half my height. My feet would drag on the ground."

"I'd carry you bridal style."

Tommy gave him a look.

It was times like these he really wished the building had an elevator. But no, because apparently disability codes (or whatever they were called) meant nothing to the architects of the building.

It took them a good ten minutes to get downstairs, with Tubbo always a few steps in front of Tommy, promising to catch him if he fell. He slipped a few times, and Tubbo did have to catch him once, but they made it down in one piece. Or, two pieces. Whatever.

If either boy had thought about it slightly longer, they would have realized that Tommy could have scooted down the stairs, or used Tubbo as a support. But no matter, they made it down alright, and they'd have plenty more days to figure it out.

Besides, now, they had a bigger problem to worry about.

The “bigger problem” was school.



# **you know, i had the same conversation with your mother**

## Chapter Notes

Short chapter for today. I think they'll start getting longer the more we get into the plot,, at least I hope so?

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

It took two days of staying with Techno and Tommy for Phil to leave. Techno was surprised that it took that long.

When they were kids, Phil would always pass over Tommy, usually shutting the kid out or ignoring him altogether. Now, Phil would hesitate before passing the kid over. The despair in his eyes was so clear every single time he looked at the child.

Techno couldn't blame him for wanting to leave. It was... A lot to handle. Everything. Techno had been dealing with the guilt of handing Tommy back to Dream. He couldn't imagine how Phil felt, having been the one to hand Tommy over in the first place.

At least the kid didn't seem upset about Phil's absence. He barely even seemed to notice, actually, which Techno brushed off rather quickly.

Everything was...

Well, it would be a lie to say everything was fine now. Despite how much he would love to say it was. Because it wasn't.

Techno was far behind on work. He'd cashed in four of his vacation days to deal with getting the house ready for Tommy. When he saw the state Tommy was in when he picked him up, he used the rest of his vacation days as well as all of his sick days to get a week off to spend with Tommy. It was only right to not leave him alone again, not after everything he had been through.

Tommy was clearly still in pain, too. Despite him claiming to be fine, Technoblade could see how he winced as he walked. And the kid kept pushing anyway, swearing to Techno that he didn't even need crutches. Of course, Techno told him off for that more times than he could count, trying desperately to explain to him that if he kept doing that, it wouldn't heal.

He couldn't push for the use of crutches as much as he'd like, though. Every time he raised his voice Tommy shrunk back, and Techno wanted to avoid that as much as possible. He needed to prove to Tommy that it was safe here.

On top of everything else, Techno's nightmares kept getting worse.

They became less nightmares and more tight terrors, considering he could barely remember what had happened in them once he woke up. He knew the general idea of them, though, considering it seemed to be the same thing every night. Wilbur would die, then Tommy would die. Dream show up at some point, usually to hurt Tommy. He couldn't remember much past that.

He thought Tommy hadn't noticed it, considering he hadn't woken Techno up from them. However, when Techno would wake, there was always a warm cup of tea on his nightstand, and he didn't have to be smart to know who put it there.

Neither would mention it in the mornings.

Occasionally, Techno would still argue with Tommy. They *were* brothers, after all. It was human nature, honestly. No angry arguments, for the most part. Just over little things, the way Techno cooked potatoes, or how Tommy left his shoes on the floor.

At least, that's all the arguments were, up until the argument about school.

Of *course* Tommy had to go to school. Techno was literally a college professor, did Tommy really think Techno wouldn't care whether or not he went? Sure, the kid might've been nervous about school, but he still had to go. But Tommy had pushed and pushed and pushed, and Techno had raised his voice in return. He shouldn't have, and seeing the spark of fear in Tommy's eyes diminished his anger immediately.

But then Tommy had tried to explain to him that it was fine if Techno hit him. That CPS wouldn't come for a while, so no one would know.

He swore he felt his heart break all over again.

He tried his best to explain to Tommy that he wasn't going to hurt him, that he was here for the kid, but that only seemed to make it worse. Tommy went from slightly terrified to on the verge of tears, and he quickly fled to his own room.

Techno came by shortly after to apologize (though for exactly what, he wasn't sure), as well as to assure Tommy that it wasn't his fault. He mentioned that what Dream had done was wrong, as he had done practically every day since Tommy moved in. He hoped that if he kept repeating the words, eventually Tommy would believe them. So far, he hadn't.

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Techno hadn't expected to be so nervous for Tommy's first day. He felt like... Like a parent, honestly. It was painfully domestic. He wondered if this was how Wilbur felt whenever he sent Tommy off to school.

Gosh, Techno wished he had been there more for the kid growing up. Sure, he would help out occasionally when Wilbur was busy, or when Wilbur was having a screaming match with Phil. But otherwise? Techno had considered Tommy nothing more than a nuisance. He'd barely even paid attention to the child.

If he had, maybe he would know how to deal with this easier. Because even though he knew kids weren't supposed to act like Tommy did, he had no real baseline for how Tommy acted before Dream took him.

Tommy had been loud. Annoying. Tommy had made it incredibly difficult for Techno to study for school. He was also... Courageous. Yeah, courageous. And completely unapologetic.

Techno wondered when he lost that courage. When he started apologizing for every single thing he did. Had Dream trained that into him?

He wished he had said 'I love you' to Tommy before he left. Even though he wouldn't have really meant it- he hadn't even said it to Phil in years- he still thought it would've been nice. Words of encouragement, even if they were, overall, meaningless.

It was too late for that now, though, as he and Tubbo had already scrambled out the door and on their way to school. And that meant...

Crap. Techno was already late for work.

He didn't bother grabbing the dishes off the table, he could wash those later. He yanked on his shoes and pulled on a wrinkled dress-shirt, frantically trying to button it.

He was so late. He couldn't be late. This was supposed to be his first day back in almost two weeks of not teaching class. He couldn't afford to be late, not only for his students, but for his job in general. He pulled a sweater over the dress-shirt and practically ran to his car.

It took twenty minutes to drive from his house to the university, which gave him time to think about everything that had been going on the last month or two.

And it was at some point during that drive that everything sunk in.

Techno was really adopting a child. Permanently. Not even just *a* child, but his *brother*. His *kid* brother, who was only fourteen and had been through more trauma than one person should have to experience in a lifetime.

He had no idea how to deal with the trauma. How to help it, or treat it, or whatever one was supposed to do with it.

Maybe this was a bad idea.

Techno... Techno was not cut out to be a parental figure. He wasn't like Schlatt, who found a way to balance work and raising a kid. He wasn't like Phil, who took his kids on adventures all across the world. He wasn't like Sam and Puffy, who had dropped everything to take care of Tommy in those few days.

Techno was just Techno. He had no idea how to deal with kids in general, much less kids with issues like Tommy had.

He was not qualified for this. He was *not* qualified at all for this. He was taking care of himself fine, sure, but having to take care of a whole new human? By himself?

But he had promised Tommy he'd take care of him. Besides, he owed this to Wilbur, didn't he?

He did.

Which meant he still had a lot of work cut out for him.

Maybe he could research how to deal with trauma in children? Was Tommy even considered traumatized? Certainly he was, after everything. But Techno didn't know exactly what counted, and gosh, he should have done all this research days ago, and not now, while he was pulling into the university parking lot.

He didn't want to go to work. Not when there was still so much he needed to do to help Tommy.

Techno took a deep breath. This was fine. He could manage it. But first- work.

The lectures were fine. For the most part, anyway. There were a few questions on his absence from some students, but he did his best to wave off or even ignore it. It wasn't that he didn't want to answer the questions- well, he didn't, but more importantly, he didn't want to think about Tommy at the moment.

Not when the thought of Tommy sent him spiraling into anxiety over just how unprepared he was to do what he had agreed to.

The rest of his teaching went by in a blur of what could be considered monologuing, only occasionally pausing to answer questions from students, and before he knew it, the work day was over.

Well, the teaching-classes part was over. He still had several hours to work on getting assignments ready and prepping future classes. The work of a teacher was never finished.

Not teacher, professor. Doctor, even. He had worked hard for his degree, not even he should trivialize the work he had put into it with cheap titles.

Once he was in his office, he dumped another pile of papers on his desk and sat down. He grabbed a pen, and was about to work on reading through essays when the object slipped from his fingers. And then...

Uh...

Huh. That was weird.

It was like he completely blanked out for a second. Only for a second, though, because he felt completely fine now. Maybe a little tired, but he had been teaching all day.

Whatever, he brushed it off quickly. He had work to do, and only a few hours before Tommy would be home.

Someone knocked on his office door.

“Uh, come in?”

Slowly, the door was pushed open, and in walked one of his students. One of the more quiet ones, but he always had good work. What his name? Cooper? No, that wasn't it.

“Hi, Professor.”

“Connor.” That was it. He hoped it was his name, anyway. “Can I help you with something?”

“No. Well, yes, no, I-” Connor paused, then handed him a folded piece of paper. No, not a piece of paper, a card. “Someone said you were sick and that’s why you weren’t teaching, so I got you a get well card.”

“Huh...” That was odd. He really hadn’t expected that. “Uh, thanks. But I wasn’t sick.” He didn’t mean for it to come off so harshly, but it did anyway.

“Oh...”

Techno didn’t have to be good at reading body language to tell the guy was uncomfortable.

“Just dealing with family issues. I... I do appreciate it, though.”

“Family issues? Is everything okay?”

Techno forced himself to nod. “It’s getting better.” He paused, then, “Did you have any school-related questions, or was it just the card?” It wasn’t that he was upset or anything, he just didn’t want to unload all the stuff he had been dealing with on this college student.

“Oh, just the card. I’ll... I’ll go now.”

“Okay. I’ll see you in my next lecture.”

“Yeah, yeah, see you.”

He ignored the dejected look on Connor’s face and instead set his attention on the stack of essays in front of him. There was a frankly ridiculous amount to read. He really needed to get working on that.

Instead of reading through the essays, he pulled out his phone and clicked on Phil’s contact, listening to the quiet ringing while he waited for Phil to pick up.

Calling Phil was a waste of time. Phil was just as lost on how to deal with Tommy as Techno was. Maybe even more, actually, because Phil still struggled to look the kid in the eyes. Asking Phil for advice was like asking a soldier how to do ballet.

He wasn’t sure where that example came from.

“Hey, mate, how’s it going?” Phil’s voice came out from the phone speakers. Techno set it on the desk.

“Just been busy. ‘S Tommy’s first day at school. I can’t tell if he’s nervous or not.”

“You were always nervous for the first day. Maybe he takes after you.”

“I don’t know,” He admitted, “I think it’s a lot different for him than it was for me.”

“Come on, Techno. You think he’s not worried about how people perceive him? Granted, he might be a little more social than you, but...” He trailed off with a laugh.

“Okay, in my defense, I had good reason to be worried. I was a nerd in high school.”

Phil snorted at that. “Only in high school?” He teased.

“Oh, shut up.”

“He... Tommy’s a good kid. I’m sure he’ll make friends.” Techno didn’t miss the waver in his father’s voice.

“But what if he doesn’t?”

“He will.”

“He’s a beanpole of a kid running around on crutches. His only friend is Tubbo. He’s going to get bullied, I can feel it-”

“Techno, take a deep breath. He’ll be fine.”

“What if he isn’t? Kids are cruel, what if-”

“Techno.” Phil repeated, his voice not stern, but in a clear I’m-your-father-listen-to-me kind of tone. “You know, I had the same conversation with your mother on your and Wilbur’s first day of middle school?”

“You did?”

He wasn’t expecting that. Not Phil being a mother-hen, because he always had been. But Phil talking about mom? He never did that.

“I did.” He laughed again, but it was so much softer than before as he recalled what must have been a fond memory. “She assured me that you’d be fine, that you two would protect each other. And she was right, you really did.”

He wished he still had Wilbur to protect him.



“But Tommy doesn’t have a twin.” Techno hadn’t meant to address that issue out loud, but it obviously was too late to take it back.

“No,” Phil agreed, “But he has Schlatt’s kid.”

Techno almost laughed at the thought. “Tubbo? He’s tiny, I don’t know if he could protect anyone.”

“I don’t know, I think the kid could be pretty scary if he tried. I mean, he has to have some semblance of gremlin energy to keep up with Tommy, right?”

Techno had overheard a few jokes shared by the two kids. He noticed the way they fit into talking almost seamlessly. He noticed how much calmer Tommy seemed around Tubbo, even calmer than he was with Techno on some days.

“You’re right, I’m probably just overreacting.”

“Not overreacting.” Phil reassured. “You’re nervous. It’s perfectly normal for a parent to... Oh...” Ah, the sadness was back. “I guess I should be the one worried for him, not you, shouldn’t I?”

To say that Phil had regretted how he treated Tommy was an understatement. He had sobbed to Techno about it the night after the court case. Techno comforted him the best he could, which wasn’t very good, but at least he tried. But it was hard, because he couldn’t say anything like ‘you tried your best’ or anything of the sort, because, in all honesty, it *was* Phil’s fault. Yes, he was grieving, but he still had ignored his son.

Techno wasn’t exempt from that. He had done the same thing to Tommy. The only difference was that he was an older brother and not a father, but considering how Wilbur had stepped up to the plate as soon as he realized that Phil wasn’t going to do it, Techno didn’t really have an excuse.

At least he was trying to be better.

“No, it’s alright. I have custody of him now, so it’s kind of my job to worry, not yours.”

Not that Phil wasn’t trying to be better. He was, he just... He didn’t know how to. He panicked when he was around Tommy, and it was so painfully obvious that he was uncomfortable with the whole situation. It was like Phil walked on eggshells when he was around Tommy, and that seemed to freak Tommy out, too.

So for now, Phil had gone home, with the promise that he would try again soon. Leaving Techno to care for Tommy alone.

He vaguely wondered what Phil's definition of 'soon' was.

"I guess." Phil didn't sound convinced. He sounded uncomfortable more than anything else. "I should get back to work. You gonna be alright with Tommy for tonight?"

"You ask like he hasn't already been here a week."

"It's been that long already?"

Techno nodded slightly despite the fact Phil couldn't see it. "About so, yeah. It... It's been hard, honestly."

"How so?"

"He's just... Nervous, I think. I keep having to tell him that I'm not-" His voice cracked, just slightly, "Not going to hurt him. It's just that no matter how many times I say he, he never seems to believe me."

"Still?"

"Yeah... Yesterday, he..." Techno paused, debating whether or not to say what he was going to. He knew it would hurt Phil, but it was also important for Phil to realize what his son was going through. "He told me that CPS wouldn't visit for a while, as if that was the only thing keeping me from hitting him or whatever."

"Oh, Techno..."

"I just don't know what to do." He buried his head in his hands, taking a few deep breaths.

"I'll do some research for you, see what I can come up with. Have you considered taking him to a therapist?"

"I have, but I doubt he'll actually want to go. He's so stubborn."

"He must get it from you. Again, I'll look into some things, see what I can do."

He could come and stay at Techno's place for a few days. He could actually speak to his son. But no, he'd research. Techno wondered if that was really enough for Phil, or if he just didn't know what to do.

"Alright. Well, I have essays to go through..."

"Right, right. I'll talk to you later, mate."

“Later.”

He hung up.

The next several hours were spent reading through essays. Some were great, some were... Mediocre. Considering they were part way through the second semester of the year, all of his students should be writing decently by now, but apparently not.

His mind wandered to Tommy's grades. Was he any good at writing? He couldn't remember. Oh, maybe that was another way to work on his trust- helping him with school. Granted, Techno wasn't the best at math, but english was his strong suit, he could do that.

He made a mental note to ask Tommy about that when he got home.

After going through a few more little things, he packed his things to go home. Schlatt was taking Tubbo and Tommy home and promised that if Techno had to stay late, Tommy could hang out at their house until he got home.

There was a silent agreement between them to not leave Tommy alone. They weren't sure why, not really. It wasn't like Dream was going to show up at their house or anything, obviously, he couldn't. It wasn't even about the thought of Tommy getting into trouble, they just...

The kid had clearly been left alone a lot by Dream. Not even just physically, but emotionally. It was important to remind him that there were people that cared. And the best way to remind him was to be physically there for him.

Once Techno got to his car, he sent Schlatt a quick text to let Tommy know he'd be home soon.

He really should buy Tommy his own phone. Tomorrow, he decided, he'd do that. He'd have to tell Tommy about it before, of course, especially since that was what this whole ordeal apparently had been caused from.

The thought that a phone had caused Tommy to end up at Techno's house still horrified him. His brother, his *baby brother* had been physically harmed all because he wanted to text his friends. And Dream, the man who was supposed to protect him, decided to hurt him for it. It was insane. Techno wished he had killed the guy when he got the chance.

Revenge could come later. Would come later, probably. Dream was only in there for five years, which was way too short, surely Techno could do something afterwards.

Just the thought of Dream hurting Tommy made him angry. Not only that, but the fact that Techno and Phil had been *complicit* in everything. It made him sick. It made him-

He almost missed the turn to his apartment parking, being so caught up in his thoughts.

He parked the car and quickly headed up the stairs to get Tommy from Schlatt's.

This was going to be okay. Life was going to get better for Tommy. It would take time, of course it would, but eventually they'd get there, right?

Techno hoped so, anyway.

## Chapter End Notes

psst, if y'all have any theories/thoughts/questions/whatever about the story, you should put them in the comments. I love talking to you guys and your comments really motivate me to keep writing faster

# you two fight like an old married couple

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Despite how Tommy acted, he actually didn't dislike school. Granted, there were classes he would always despise, especially science, but for the most part, he enjoyed it.

School was an escape from Dream. No, no, that was a rude way to put it. It wasn't an *escape*, it was just... A place where he could be with other people. That was a weird way to phrase it... He liked Dream, he did, really. It was just sometimes he could be a bit overwhelming. It was nice to be somewhere else for a little while.

He should've asked Techno what his rules for grades were before he left.

Dream cared a lot about his grades. Something about how he was 'representing Dream's parenting' or something like that. Whatever it was, it meant that Tommy was supposed to get all A's, maybe B+'s if Dream was feeling particularly lenient. If not, he'd get punished.

If there was any correlation between being punished for bad grades and Tommy learning to cheat on tests, he pretended not to notice it.

He was walking down the school hallway next to Tubbo, who was clutching Tommy's schedule in his hand.

"We actually have mostly the same classes." Tubbo explained, gesturing to the list. "Except for science and English. And electives."

"I have electives? I didn't get to choose any..."

"You're in... Computer... Something." Tubbo said, squinting at the words before holding it up to Tommy.

"Computer science. But I didn't choose it."

Tubbo shrugged. "Maybe it was the only empty class? Since you're joining so late in the year."

"I guess. Whatever, which class is first?"

"English. But you're in the class above me, so I don't know what you're doing. Probably going over a reading though, that's what we're doing in my class, anyway. But I guess you

haven't read it yet." Tubbo pulled the door to the classroom open. "Don't worry, I'm sure the teacher will be understanding."

If they hadn't gotten there late, everyone probably wouldn't have stared at them. But it was five minutes after class started (thanks to Tommy's slow walking) and as soon as Tubbo opened the door, all eyes were on them. Once Tommy was inside, Tubbo gave him a quick whisper of 'good luck' before running off to his own class.

The teacher was not understanding. She wrote him a tardy note and told him not to make it a habit before sending him back to a desk.

Tommy silently thanked his lucky stars that he wasn't forced to introduce himself and was able to find a seat in the back of the class.

Usually he wasn't one of those kids to sit in the very back, but he didn't really feel like being seen.

Tommy took a few deep breaths. This was okay. He could survive this. It wasn't like he had never been to school before, he just hadn't been in a while.

He missed his old friends. Freddy and the rest of the lot. Even if they had encouraged him to break rules and get in trouble, they were good kids. Tommy hadn't even gotten to say goodbye. He wondered if they would know what happened to him, or if he had just disappeared one day and that was it.

Maybe he could ask Tubbo if he could borrow his phone to text them... Not now, though. Not when the teacher was saying something about a project based on the reading. Right, the reading that he hadn't done.

He'd ask afterwards if he could be excused.

"Now, this will be a mandatory group project, so everyone, choose a partner and move your desks into groups."

Oh. Apparently not.

Everyone was looking around the room and moving to who Tommy presumed were their friends. Which left Tommy awkwardly sitting by himself.

Great.

“Hey, you. Crutches. Yes, *you*.” A harsh voice spoke. “You don’t have a partner?”

“...No, not really.”

They laughed. “You should join the memory boy over there.” The guy pointed at some kid sitting in the back corner, paying them no mind. He looked... Scared out of his mind, honestly. It was almost pathetic. Tommy very nearly felt bad for him.

“I... Okay.” That gained more laughter. Tommy couldn’t find it in himself to care. He pulled his backpack over a shoulder then made his way over to ‘memory boy’.

Memory boy didn’t seem to notice him, too caught up in scribbling something out in a notebook. His hair was dark black with streaks of white, and it was cut into a mullet, though whether that was a purposeful choice or he just needed a haircut, Tommy wasn’t sure. Memory boy was also tan, though he had splotches of skin which looked... Lighter? That was strange, but Tommy didn’t comment on it. He was rude, but not a complete jerk.

Memory boy also looked incredibly uncomfortable.

Tommy dropped his backpack down on the desk next to him before sitting down, though not letting go of the crutches.

“You have a partner yet?”

“Uh... No?”

“You want one?”

“I usually work alone on group projects. It’s, uh, no big deal, really. We have an uneven number of students in class, so...”

Tommy stared at him for a moment.

He had two options here: Leave this poor kid alone and work on the project himself, or keep terrifying the guy and get help with the assignment.

Considering he had no idea what book the project was supposed to be based on, much less what they actually had to do, Tommy chose the first option.

“I’m new here, actually. So I guess it’s even now.”

Memory boy looked up at him for a moment. “Oh.”

“Yeah, ‘oh’.” He hated how disappointed the guy looked at him. It wasn’t like Tommy had done anything wrong. Had he? No, nothing he could think of.

“Well... In that case, hi, I’m Ranboo.”

“Did... Did you say ‘Ranboob’?”

“No, no, *Ranboo*. Like, you know, ‘boo, I’m scaring you’?”

Tommy snorted. “Sure thing, *Ranboob*. I’m Tommy.”

They stared at each other for a long moment.

“So... Why do they call you memory boy?”

“What?”

“That’s how they referred to you. Those guys over there.” Tommy gestured vaguely to the group of guys who had been laughing.

Ranboo just sighed. “They’re jerks.”

“Oh.”

“Yeah... It’s- it’s whatever, doesn’t matter. Have you read the book yet?”

“I don’t even know what book we’re supposed to have read.”

“Fahrenheit 451. Ray Bradbury.”

“I’ve literally never heard of that in my life.”

Ranboo stared at him again. “I’ll lend you my copy.”



“I don’t want your pity book.”

“My what?”

Their stilted conversation continued throughout the rest of the class. Ranboo did his best to explain the plot of the book, something about firefighters and banned books, but he clearly didn’t remember much of what happened. Considering neither boy really understood the book, nor the project, they quickly fell into discussing other topics. Mostly comics and video games.

He lost track of time talking to Ranboo. It actually was sort of nice. Especially since he didn’t have to worry about Dream telling him he couldn’t talk to the kids at school.

He didn’t have to worry about that with Techno, right? Techno let him hang out with Tubbo all the time, but would Ranboo be a different case? He hoped not.

The bell rang. Ranboo stood up, and it was at that moment Tommy realized just how tall he was. Tommy himself was around five-foot-eight, inches above everyone else. This kid had to be five-eleven, maybe even six feet tall.

Ranboo looked down at him. “What’s your next class?”

“Good question.” He reached into his backpack to find his schedule, only to come out empty handed. “Tubbo has my schedule.”

“Tubbo? I know him, he’s in my math class. We can go find him real quick if you need.”

Tommy nodded to that and stood, carefully balancing on one foot as he struggled with his backpack and crutches again. How much longer till he got the cast off? The doctors had said two months, and it had been... Less than two weeks.

“I can take your backpack if you want.” Ranboo suggested, already reaching for it.

Tommy jerked it away quickly out of habit, nearly losing balance and falling over. Reasonably, he knew this guy wasn’t going to take his stuff. But Dream had, and it was instinct at this point for Tommy to try and protect his property.

“Or... Not. Sorry.”

Tommy pulled the backpack over his shoulder and tucked the crutches under his arms. “You said you know what class Tubbo’s in?”

“Yeah. He’s probably heading to history right now, come on, I’ll take you.”

It turned out that the three had the same history and math classes. It also turned out that Ranboo and Tubbo already knew each other and were vaguely friends. The three ended up sitting together in class, Ranboo taking notes, Tubbo scribbling something on his paper, and Tommy... Not really paying attention at all.

It wasn’t that he didn’t want to pay attention. Not that he particularly did, but he knew grades were important. It was just he had no idea anything the teacher was going on about. Apparently that’s what missing two months of school did to a person.

He’d have to ask Ranboo for notes, maybe. Or just talk to the teacher... No, he’d ask for notes.

Lunch came next, followed by the rest of his classes, which passed quickly and without too much trouble. He was alone in science, as well as his very last class, computer science, but he didn’t mind. Tubbo promised to meet him outside the classroom once it was finished, anyway.

Despite having very little interaction with computers, he still really liked them. Plus, they were going over something about programming.

Granted, Tommy knew nothing about programming, but he still found it interesting, even if he had missed a month of class.

Most people didn’t talk to him. He wasn’t sure if that was a good thing or not. At his old school, he didn’t talk to many people, but at least they didn’t seem to flat out ignore him. He wondered if anyone had even noticed he was missing. Surely someone had at this point, even if it was just Freddy or someone. Would they miss him? Probably not. Dream had said they hadn’t really cared about him, and Dream was usually right.

The bell rang, catching Tommy off-guard. He had to hold back a flinch and just pray nobody had noticed. It looked like they hadn’t, though, because everyone was already rushing out of class as Tommy once again struggled to his feet.

He was surprised to not be met with Tubbo and Ranboo when he walked out of the door.

They left him. They abandoned him. Dream was right, nobody cared except him, he should've stayed where he was, shouldn't have run away-

They were making their way down the hallway, talking. Tommy wasn't sure why his first thought was that they left him, nor why that freaked him out so much. He elected to ignore that and make his way over to his friends (friends, plural? Or friend and Ranboo. He wasn't sure).

"Tommy!" Tubbo shouted, running over to greet him. Tubbo had been surprisingly fine with the fact that Tommy had lied to him about his name, though he still switched back and forth regularly between 'Tommy' and 'Theo', Tommy didn't really mind.

"Tubbo!" Tommy shouted back. Tubbo was with him in a moment, Ranboo close behind.

"I was telling Ranboo that we could- here, give me your backpack- give him a ride home." Tubbo slipped Tommy's backpack off of Tubbo's shoulders.

He wasn't going to steal it. It was just so Tommy could walk easier. He had to keep reminding himself of that.

"And I was telling Tubbo that it wasn't a big deal, I can walk just fine." Ranboo replied. Tubbo taking Tommy's backpack might've felt like a bigger deal if Ranboo wasn't currently carrying Tubbo's backpack as well as his own.

"It's a mile away!"

"A mile is forever!"

"It's a twenty minute walk!"

Tommy just rolled his eyes and started heading for the door. Tubbo and Ranboo followed, continuing to argue all the way.

"You two fight like an old married couple." Tommy mumbled. He meant it to be quiet, but they both heard and stared at him. For a moment, Tommy was sure he'd screwed up. He

hadn't meant it, it was supposed to be a joke, but clearly they took it the wrong way, and... Oh. They burst out laughing.

They got into Schlatt's car after a brief argument over who got to ride shotgun. Tubbo, because he was Schlatt's son, Ranboo, because he was tallest, or Tommy, because he was injured.

Ranboo won.

Schlatt looked... A little annoyed to bring Ranboo home. Maybe not annoyed, but... Tommy wasn't sure what, actually. But it made him nervous. Was Tubbo going to get in trouble for giving Ranboo a ride? Schlatt seemed cool, and Tubbo didn't look nervous at all.

It would probably be fine. They dropped Ranboo off at his house and headed back to the apartment complex.

"So, Tommy, how was your first day of school?" Schlatt asked, and Tommy could barely hear it over the blasting radio.

He just shrugged in response. "It was okay. Nothing exciting."

"Nothing? No fights? No... Prom? I- I really don't know what high school kids do."

"They don't have... Yeah, Schlatt, no fights or prom. It was really... Uneventful."

"Good uneventful or bad uneventful?"

"Good. I think."

"Good." A pause, then, "I think your brother's still at work, so if you want to come over and hang with Tubbo you're more than welcome to."

Tommy thought about the request for a moment, then shook his head slightly. As much as he would love to spend more time with Tubbo, he needed to get caught up in school as soon as possible. He had a mountain of homework in his backpack that he needed to be done with by... Next week, probably? He wasn't sure. Dream would've wanted it done in a week, so Tommy decided to go by that.

“Can’t, I have homework.”

“What, Tubbo can’t help you?”

“Tubbo can’t read.” He joked. It earned a laugh from Schlatt and a light slap to the arm from Tubbo. Tommy had to hold back a flinch. Of course Tubbo wasn’t going to actually hurt him, but his body didn’t really seem to understand that.

“I can read!” Tubbo shouted.

“I’ve seen the messages you sent me.” Tommy retorted. “You can barely write.”

Tubbo stuck his tongue out at him. Tommy made the same expression back. The argument continued all the way back to the apartment.

Back... Home.

He wasn’t sure if he wanted to call it that yet. He used to call Dream’s house his home, too, and look at how that turned out.

It wasn’t the same. He knew that it wasn’t the same thing, not even close, but he couldn’t help but be wary. After all, Dream hadn’t hurt him from the beginning. And Wilbur...

You weren’t supposed to speak ill of the dead. That was the saying, or something like that. Wilbur was a good guardian. Better than Dream.

But Dream was... Dream was the only one who wanted him... Right? No, no, because Techno and Puffy and Sam and Tubbo... But it wasn’t the same, was it? It was different, the way they showed how they cared. He didn’t know.

It was another reason he wanted to be alone. He wanted to gather his thoughts.

He didn’t get that chance, since Techno had forgotten to give Tommy a house key and apparently didn’t believe in hiding a spare under the welcome mat. Techno didn’t even *have* a welcome mat.

Tommy didn't want to admit he knew how to pick locks to Schlatt, either, so he went with the next best option and hung out with Tubbo until Techno got home.

They stayed in Tubbo's room working on homework, some video game music playing quietly from Tubbo's phone. Tommy was sprawled out across the floor, papers spread in front of him. Tubbo sat more respectfully at his desk.

Two hours after they got back from school, Techno came home. Which meant Tommy could *finally* go back h- to his room. He liked his room. He gathered his papers and stuffed them in his backpack before heading across the hall to Techno's apartment.

"How was school?" Techno asked. He was still dressed for work and was currently doing dishes.

"It was good. Kind of boring."

"Did you make any friends or anything?"

"I met this kid, Ranboo. He's alright I guess."

"That's good, that's good. How about your classes? Your teachers give you any trouble?" Oh, they were going into it that early. That was fine, Tommy could brush it off.

"No, everything was fine. But I actually have a bunch of homework, so I'd better start working on it." He said, making his way to his room as he spoke.

"You know, Tommy, if you want help with anything, I'm sure I could. I teach for a living, so-"

"No thanks, Techno. I appreciate it though." Tommy quickly closed the door behind him before making it over to his desk.

It wasn't that he didn't want to spend time with Techno, because he did. His older brother was surprisingly cool. More so than Tommy had realized growing up. But doing homework with him sounded like a nightmare.

He remembered late nights of staying up with Wilbur as he attempted to work through math problems. Wilbur repeating the question to him over and over again, getting more and more frustrated.

Sometimes, Wilbur would shout. And it would remind him of living with Phil. Except at least when they lived with Phil, he could hide from the noise with Techno. When it was just him and Wilbur, he had to take the full force of the shouts. Wilbur would just get so *angry*, and in return, Tommy would freak out, because he was doing his best and Wilbur just didn't seem to understand. Wilbur would take breaks from helping to go smoke, or worse, drink.

Tommy would never admit it, but moments like those made him scared of Wilbur. Which, looking back, was funny, because Wilbur would never actually hurt him. He had never raised a hand to Tommy, even then. Although he wondered if Wilbur ever would have, if he had the chance.

No, he wouldn't. Wilbur would never hurt him.

Would Techno?

Tommy couldn't stop questioning that. It was half of the reason why Tommy didn't want help with his homework. Because if Wilbur got *that* frustrated over it, then how would Techno, the man trained in a dozen different ways of fighting, react? Techno was smart, he didn't need to deal with Tommy's stupidity.

Hey, he wasn't stupid. Well... Maybe a little. He did stupid things. Said stupid things. The stupid things would get him punished. He didn't want to get punished.

His outburst at Technoblade yesterday had been out of stupidity. He wasn't going to let that happen again if he could help it.

Besides, he could do the homework on his own. Even if he could barely focus on it, and the dull throbbing of his ankle was always clear in the back of his mind. Maybe he needed more pain meds, but the stuff Dream had given him made him wary of pills. It was fine. He was alright. He could push past it.

It was hard to focus. It was harder to understand what exactly he was supposed to do with the homework. Some questions felt obvious, but others he didn't know at all. He could guess, maybe? But if he guessed wrong, it would ruin his grades, and he couldn't risk it.

He had no idea how long it was before Techno knocked lightly on his door. *Lightly*, he noted, because nothing Techno did seemed to be 'light', except when he was trying to be extra nice

to Tommy. Tommy may have been stupid, but he wasn't an idiot. He could tell when his brother was acting out of pity.

"Dinner's ready." Techno called. It had become tradition for them to spend each meal together, something about family bonding or whatever.

Tommy suspected it was because Techno wanted to make sure he was eating.

He wasn't underweight, the doctor was just wrong. Okay, he may have been underweight, but 'severely' was going too far. He ate when he was hungry, and had a stash of granola bars underneath his bed to show it.

It's just that Tommy never seemed to be hungry as of late. He suspected it was because he was eating too much, considering Techno had been forcing him to have at least two meals a day, usually offering him a snack or something in-between, too.

He usually wasn't hungry for snacks. Wasn't hungry now, even. He had a month's work of homework to get through, and-

Oh. Hunger didn't even matter.

"I haven't finished homework yet." Tommy called back. He was glaring down at a question on his paper, as if that would solve his problems.

How could he forget? No food until he finished his homework. Whether he finished that at three in the afternoon or three in the morning, it didn't matter. That was the rule, that was always the rule. And it made sense, really. Hunger was a good motivator.

That said, it was going to be a lot later than three AM when Tommy would finish the homework. Three days, he guessed, if he spent all his energy on it. Okay, he could work with that. He'd had worse, probably.

"You can finish it later. Eat now."



Wasn't Techno a teacher? Shouldn't he care more about this than he was? Maybe he didn't understand just how much homework there was.

"I can't. I have, like, two months of homework to do."

It was more like a month worth, and even then the workload had majorly been cut down for him. He should've been more grateful it was so little. If he was still with Dream, he probably would've had to do all the homework he'd missed while he was out injured.

"Tommy," Techno's voice was warning. It didn't have an edge to it like Dream's, though, which meant Tommy probably wasn't actually in trouble.

"Okay, okay, a month's worth. But it's still a lot."

"Tommy," Techno repeated. He opened the door to Tommy's room. Tommy didn't look up, still staring down at the question in front of him, re-reading the words as if that would help him understand it.

"I can do it in three days, I think. If I work fast."

"Theseus." A hand was on his shoulder. Tommy held back yet another flinch. It wasn't just *a* hand, it was *Techno's* hand. Techno wasn't going to hurt him, it was okay. "You don't have to do it all in a week. Please, just come eat dinner?"

"I'm really not all that hungry..."

Techno had picked up Tommy's crutches from where they leaned against the table and held them out to Tommy. "Come on, it won't be very long. You can get back to work after, okay?"

Tommy grumbled about how unfair it was under his breath, but eventually took the crutches from Techno and followed him out into the kitchen.

Dinner was potato soup. Gross.

Okay, it wasn't gross, it actually was surprisingly good, but Tommy was so sick of soups, even if it was nice in the cold weather. It seemed to be all that Techno would cook as of late. Tommy much preferred... Pizza. Or burgers or anything other than soup.

Techno must've noticed the face Tommy made upon seeing dinner.

"I think we have pasta in the fridge if you want that instead."

"I already said I wasn't hungry." Tommy muttered as he took a seat.

"I know, I know. But you have to eat."

"Why?"

"You were starved, Tommy."

"I wasn't-"

"You have to eat."

Tommy shot him a glare.

It was funny, honestly. He thought that living with Techno would be all sunshine and rainbows, but it really wasn't. They still quarreled and argued just like he and Wilbur used to.

He needed to stop comparing Techno to Wilbur. It just made everything feel worse.

"That came off harsher than I meant." Techno sighed. "I just meant that it's important for you to eat. You're a teenage boy, you..." Techno trailed off, staring at something on the table that Tommy couldn't see.

"Uh... Big man? You here?" Tommy waved a hand in front of his brother's eyes, and that seemed to snap him out of it.

"You..." He shook his head. Squeezed his eyes shut a few times. Opened them slowly. "You're supposed to be eating me out of house and home, you know."

Tommy ignored what he was saying completely. "What was that?"

"What was what?"

"You trailed off. Stared at nothing. You good?"

"I'm fine. I just... Zoned out."

"Since when do you zone out?"

Techno rolled his eyes. "Do you want the soup or pasta?"

"Neither. Are you sure you're okay?"

"I'm positive. Soup or pasta?"

Tommy stuck his tongue out at Techno. "Soup. But tomorrow *I'm* cooking."

Techno gave him a look. "Last time I heard about you cooking, you nearly burnt the house down. "

"I was seven and it was an accident! I've gotten better at cooking, I swear. I'll even bring Tubbo, he can be my assistant or something."

Techno pretended to look annoyed, but Tommy could see the smile creeping up on his face. "Sure, Tommy. You can cook tomorrow."

## Chapter End Notes

there are two wolves inside of you. one knows you have to establish normalcy before conflict. the other wants to write conflict.

you're speed running the chapters in order to write the conflict sooner

# too old for a party

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Time passed quickly after Tommy's first day of school. A day turned into a week, turned into two, turned into three months.

After the second month, Tommy was finally able to get his cast off. Which was... Both good and bad. He walked with a pretty bad limp, and though Techno hated the thought, he was pretty sure Tommy would have it the rest of his life.

He swore his ankle didn't hurt him anymore, but just by the way Tommy grimaced when he walked, Techno knew he was lying. Every time he moved it, the ankle clicked, which Tommy insisted was very cool, but Techno constantly worried about, despite doctors telling him it was fine.

After a week of Tommy struggling to get around, Techno bought him a cane.

"This isn't fair, I feel like an old man." Tommy complained. "Not even *Phil* uses a cane, and he's, like, sixty!"

Techno looked at him incredulously. "Tommy- do you think he's *sixty*?"

Tommy replied deadpan. "He's ancient." That had sent Techno into hysterics, though then again, so did most things Tommy said about Phil nowadays. Tommy started laughing, too. "What? I'm right!"

Tommy was a lot less apprehensive about it once Tubbo insisted on 'decorating' his cane. Decorating apparently meant tying chains of beads around the top. Some were shaped like bees, some music notes. One of the chains had letter beads spelling out 'Tubbo' as well as one with 'Ranboo'. If Techno also noticed a few with swear words, he didn't mention anything about it.

Speaking of Tubbo and Ranboo, the three had quickly become inseparable. More often than not, Techno would come home to see them sitting on the couch playing video games, watching movies, or doing something else to keep them entertained.

Tubbo and Ranboo were like angels in Tommy's life. Even on Tommy's worst days, they were able to lighten his mood, if only a little bit.

Well, maybe not angels. Tubbo was just as much of a gremlin as Tommy was, maybe more in some ways. Techno had figured this out when, on one of Tommy's 'bad leg days', as they'd taken to calling it, Tubbo had tried to give a piggyback ride to the much taller boy as a way to get down the stairs so they could go to the park.

They had made it down two floors when Tubbo's foot slipped and they tumbled down the rest of the stairs. It was honestly a miracle neither boy was badly hurt. A few bruises, sure, but nothing broken or even sprained. They still went to the park, Tubbo carrying Tommy (though much more carefully the second time).

Techno and Schlatt had a long discussion (argument) after that, about Tommy's safety, and how Tubbo needed to be more careful. Granted, it was mostly Techno yelling at Schlatt, until Schlatt reminded him that they were kids and that they were bound to do stupid things.

He was right, though. Tommy was still a kid, even after everything he had been through.

It was good to let him be a kid sometimes.

As time went on, Tommy's stubbornness about the cane seemed to soften. He went from barely using it at all to bringing it almost everywhere. He swore that it was just because it could double as a weapon, but obviously it helped the kid actually walk, too. And as long as Tommy used it, Techno didn't care what reason he said it was for.

Of course, he was still about fifty-fifty when it came to using it at school. Techno had talked with the principal a few times about kids bullying Tommy over it (not that Tommy had said anything, but it was clear that was what had happened), and was told there was nothing to be done about it. Techno figured he was getting bullied because of the cane, since he couldn't think of any other reason Tommy would be so adamant against using it.

Tommy refused to tell him. Techno just kept trying to convince him to use the cane.

On the third month, things were finally looking up. They were finally closing in on the adoption (which was a much longer process than anticipated), Tommy had stopped being terrified of everything (he was still scared of lots of things, but it was progress), and Techno had, more or less, caught up on his work.

His blackouts were still happening. They were getting worse, actually, going from once or twice a day to a dozen times. He didn't mention it. Shook it off the best he could. They didn't

matter, not really, not when he had so many other things to deal with.

Those ‘other things’ included working on Phil’s relationship with Tommy, which was still incredibly rocky. After Tommy’s third week living there, Techno established a weekly phone call between Phil and Tommy. Techno, not being a snoop, didn’t listen to what they were saying, but from the bits and pieces they would mention about the calls afterwards... The calls certainly could’ve been going better. Tommy didn’t really want anything to do with Phil. Phil didn’t know where to begin on his relationship with Tommy. Every time Techno suggested Phil come visit them, he politely declined.

There was still a lot more work to be done between those two, but at least it was a start.

Techno currently lay across the couch, holding a book up above his head as he flipped through the pages. Tommy was on the floor next to him, playing games on the phone Techno had bought him months ago.

He still remembered how confused Tommy looked, as well as how excited he was.

“This... This is really for me?” Tommy had asked, eyes wide when he stared at the phone.

“Yeah, it’s for you. That’s why I said “this is for you” when I gave it to you.” He teased.

“Yeah, but like... It’s for *me*?”

“Who else would it be for?”

“No, no, but I get to keep it?”

“Yes.”

“And you’re not gonna take it from me?”

“No.”

“...Cool.”

He didn’t regret giving Tommy the phone by any means, but he swore the child had gotten addicted to the thing as soon as it sunk in that Techno really wasn’t going to take it away from him. Now he spent most of his time on some app messaging Tubbo and Ranboo.

Techno set his book down beside him. "Tommy." This was the third time Techno had called his name, and was honestly about to text him, despite the fact he was two feet away, when Tommy finally looked up.

"Blade."

"Is your birthday on the twenty-second or the twenty-third?"

Tommy looked up at that. "Huh?"

"Your birthday. I know it's in April, but is it the twenty-second or the twenty-third?"

"...It's the ninth."

"You're kidding." Techno knew that it was coming up, but was it really that close? He swore it was later in the month.

"Nope." Tommy replied, popping the 'p'. He went back to scrolling on his phone.

"I guess we need to get planning now, then, huh?"

He looked back up. "Planning for what?"

"Your party?"

"...What party?"

"Your... Birthday party?"

"Oh... I don't... Really... Do those..." Tommy's words fell into mumbles, though Techno understood most of what he said.

"Is..." He had to be careful about how he phrased his question. He had learned early on that, though Tommy somewhat understood the things Dream did was wrong, he was still struggling with the idea that Dream was a bad person. "When did you stop having parties?"

"Four years ago."

"Right. But was that because you didn't want to have parties, or...?"

Tommy gave him a look, as if the answer was supposed to be obvious. "I'm too old for them."

"You're... Fourteen."

"Almost fifteen!"

"You were ten."

"Yeah, too old for a party." Tommy shrugged.

“Tommy, even adults throw birthday parties. You know that, right?”

“I think you’re making things up.” Deflecting. Tommy was deflecting. He had been doing that a lot lately.

“I’m not. Look, Tommy... Do you *want* a birthday party?”

He frowned. “What do you mean?”

“Do you want to have a party? We’ll do whatever you want, invite over Tubbo and Ranboo or whoever. It doesn’t even have to be anything big.”

Tommy’s gaze turned to the ground for a long moment, seeming to be lost in thought. “And I get to choose what we do?”

“Yeah.”

“Can we watch a movie?”

“Of course.”

“Okay... Techno?”

“Yeah?”

“I think I want to have a birthday party.”

----

It was like fate that the ninth landed on a Saturday. Tommy, Ranboo, and Tubbo had gone out to watch a movie. Techno wasn’t sure which one, though he was pretty sure it was something about superheroes. Or... Disney? He’d hear about it later, he was sure.

The movie was in the morning, and the three boys came back to the apartment to hang out and play video games after.

Tommy didn’t have many friends in school, it was pretty much just Tubbo and Ranboo. He did, however, have a lot of adults who cared about him. Tommy decided to invite all of them to the party. Techno had humored him, too, since he hadn’t thought they would all come.

They did.



Tommy's party consisted of himself, Techno, Ranboo, Tubbo, Schlatt, Sam, Puffy, Niki, and Phil. Nine people all in Techno's two-person apartment.

It should have been weird having this many adults at a child's birthday party, though he supposed that the age gap had been the same at Tommy's childhood parties, too.

Speaking of, he was surprised Niki was there. He had lost contact with her years ago, but apparently she co-owned a bakery with Schlatt's sister. Small world, he guessed.

More surprising, Phil was there. Phil Watson, the man who hadn't attended a single one of Tommy's birthdays growing up (not that Techno had been much better), had decided to come. Techno made him promise to try and talk to Tommy.

So far, they hadn't spoken yet. Techno tried to remind himself that it would just take time, and besides, Tommy was more caught up in a conversation with Tubbo at the moment, so even if Phil wanted to talk to him, he might've felt too awkward to interrupt.

Most of the adults were chatting with each other. It felt awkward to have so many strangers in his house. He guessed they weren't all strangers, but Sam and Puffy certainly were. And he hadn't spoken to Niki in years. Okay, really the only non-strangers were Phil and Schlatt.

He made his way over to Phil.

"He looks happy." Phil said softly, gesturing to Tommy, who was currently telling some sort of story to Tubbo, making overdramatic hand movements as he talked, waving his cane every which way.

"He does."

"I'm glad. I was... After the court, I was worried..." He trailed off.

"That he'd never be a kid again?" Techno guessed. With a nod from Phil, he continued. "He still struggles. It's been months and he still doesn't believe he's really safe. He still keeps asking if he's allowed to use the tv remote for goodness sakes."

"But it's a start."

"A lousy start."

"A good start."

Techno sighed. "You should talk to him, you know."

“I couldn’t.”

“You’re his father, Phil.”

Phil’s expression went from calm to distraught in less than a second. “Don’t say that.” He snapped, then immediately, much calmer, “Sorry, I didn’t mean it like that. I just... You sound like Wilbur.”

“Yeah...”

“You remind me so much of him, you know.”

“I’m his twin, of course I do.”

“No, no, I mean just... In how you act.”

“Because I took in Tommy.” He suggested.

“No. Well, yes, but... You’re just so grown up.”

“I’m an adult, Phil.”

He watched as Tommy pulled his phone out of his pocket and make a face. He said something to Tubbo and handed his cane to Ranboo before going into his room and shutting the door.

“You’re still a kid compared to me.” Phil reached up to ruffle Techno’s hair, to which Techno responded by fake gagging.

“Phil, I am twenty-six years old, don’t you dare.”

“Oh come on, mate. I’m your dad. Of course I’m always going to think of you as a kid.”

Tubbo and Ranboo were talking now. Ranboo was holding Tommy’s cane, moving it in between his left and right hand. He looked almost nervous, though Techno wasn’t sure why.

“Twenty-six, Phil.”

“You’ll never stop being a kid to me, Techno.”

Techno just rolled his eyes.

They stood next to each other, watching the party for a long moment. Once Tommy came out of his room, he figured they'd open presents and have cake. It was getting late, anyway, and a few of the guests had a two-hour drive back home, he wouldn't want to keep them too long.

When he saw Tommy's door open, he was about to announce it was time for presents, when he saw how Tommy looked.

Tommy was pale. His hand, still gripping the phone, shook slightly. He looked... Unnerved.

"Are you okay, Tommy? Who was calling you?" Techno asked, quickly making his way over to him.

And in an instant, Tommy was back to his semi-regular, happy self. He gave Techno a grin. "My old pal, Aaron. He called to wish me a happy birthday, and I was surprised because I didn't think he remembered, but here we are."

Was he lying? He had to be, right? Why would a friend calling him freak him out so much? Then again, he had no reason to lie, not really. Maybe... maybe Techno was reading too far into things.

It just felt like life had been good lately. *Too* good, considering how it had been as of late. Techno just needed to accept that it was good and move on.

Techno gave him a look, but Tommy didn't back down, the smile still plastered on his face. "If you say so. I was thinking we do presents now, if you're up for it."

"I get presents?"

"Of course you do, it's your birthday!"

The phone call was quickly forgotten as presents were introduced. Tommy looked more excited than Techno had seen him in a long time. It was good.

He got lots of different things. A card from Niki with a few dollars in it, and an explanation that the birthday cake was her gift. A pair of headphones and a nerf gun from Sam and Puffy. Several records from Ranboo and Tubbo (paid for by Schlatt, though they weren't going to tell Tommy that).

Techno gave him an emerald ring with the promise to explain the meaning behind it later, as well as a manilla envelope.

“Gee, Techno, I can’t believe you remembered my love of envelopes.” Tommy joked, earning a few laughs.

Techno just rolled his eyes. “Open the envelope, Tommy.”

Tommy did so. He pulled the stack of papers out, and his eyes went wide. He flipped through the pages, eyes scanning over each one, though not reading them.

“You...” Tommy trailed off, looking up at Techno.

“Adoption papers. All signed and ready to be finalized.”

Tommy broke into a grin again. Before Techno could protest, he had dropped the papers on the floor and ran to Techno, wrapping him up in a hug. It took a moment, but Techno hugged him back tightly, even lifting him off the floor just a little bit. If he heard the sound of someone taking a picture, he elected to ignore it.

The only person left to give Tommy something was Phil.

And Phil...

Phil didn’t have a gift.

“I swear I have something for you, Tommy,” He apologized, “It was supposed to arrive sooner, but it’s coming from the UK, and apparently the whole shipping process is a nightmare. They told me it should be here a day or two from now.”

Tommy just nodded. He didn’t look disappointed, almost like he expected it.

Techno took Phil outside and chewed him out for it while everyone else was eating cake, though once Phil explained what the gift was, he calmed down a bit.

“You... You really want to give that to him?”

“I do. I think if anyone deserves it, it’s him. Besides, it doesn’t do much good sitting in storage, does it?”

Techno couldn’t help but smile. “You’re right. I think he’ll really like it.”

The rest of the night passed smoothly, and eventually, everyone went home. Even Phil had decided to stay at a local hotel instead of Techno’s couch, though Techno suspected it was from the guilt of not having a present rather than wanting to avoid Tommy. That was good, that was progress.

They stayed up late watching another movie before Techno finally went to bed. It was only eleven, but he was tired from all the social interaction. He promised Tommy they would do something fun tomorrow- go out for a nice dinner or something- before he retired to his room.

It wasn’t long after he fell asleep that he woke to a quiet knock on his door. Techno sat up with a groan and glanced at his alarm clock- two AM. Ugh, it was too early for this.

Another knock at the door, and then, a soft voice from outside.

“Techno?”

He rubbed his eyes. “Tommy?”

“Oh- did I wake you? I’m sorry, sorry, I- I’ll go-”

“It’s fine, do you want to come in?”

The door slowly creaked open, and there was Tommy, standing there in pajamas. His hair was messed up, and he looked like he hadn’t gotten a wink of sleep.

Techno frowned. “Are you okay? Are you sick?”

Tommy shook his head. He didn’t move from his spot in the doorway. “No, no, sorry, I’m fine.”

“Mhm, sure.” He muttered sarcastically. “Come here. Sit.”

Slowly, Tommy shuffled into Techno's room. He must have left his cane in his own room, because he was limping terribly. Techno made a mental note to make a doctor's appointment as Tommy sat down on the bed next to him.

He pulled part of the blanket over Tommy. "Did you have a nightmare?"

"No."

"Couldn't sleep?"

"Yeah."

"Do you want to talk about it?"

"Not really."

Techno remembered when he was younger, maybe sixteen or so, when he was staying up far later than he should reading. Every once in a while, he'd hear the quiet shuffling of small feet on the wood floors, before a knock on the door next to his own.

The door would open, and each time Techno would hear Tommy's sniffling voice mutter out "I had a nightmare. Can I sleep with you tonight?", followed by Wilbur's quiet agreement. More feet shuffling, the door would close, and the house would fall silent again.

Wilbur was always more touchy-feely than Techno was. Techno had gotten considerably better these last few months, but he was nowhere near the brother Wilbur was. He wanted to be kind, sure, but it wasn't natural like it was for Wilbur.

Still, Tommy was clearly upset about something, and even if it wasn't a nightmare, it was Techno's job to comfort him.

"Do you want to sleep in here tonight?"

"Can I?"

Techno shuffled over to the side of his bed. "Yeah. But if you hog all the blankets, I'm kicking you out."

Tommy's eyes widened. "Of your house?"

"Of the *bed*. Geez, Tommy, I'm not *that* mean. It was a joke, anyway." He paused. "But don't hog the blankets."

Tommy snorted. "If I get cold, it's not my fault."

“Theseus, I swear-”

“Goodnight, Technoblade!” Tommy laid down, deliberately pulling the blanket a little closer to him. Surprisingly, it didn’t get on Techno’s nerves as much as it should have.

“Goodnight, Tommy.”

## Chapter End Notes

I feel like these chapters are really short, but I also don't want to stretch them out too much? I dunno, I'll figure something out

# technoblade never dies

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The phone call kept repeating in Tommy's head.

Every time he looked at his phone he expected to see the same number calling him again. For the same robotic voice to answer him when he picked up.

“You are receiving a call from the Wyoming State Penitentiary,” It had said, “From the inmate number one-nine-six-zero-zero-two-five, Dream. Press one to accept.”

He shouldn't have accepted the phone call. He *knew* he shouldn't have. Techno would've been upset to find out he had been talking to Dream. Then again, Dream would've been upset if Tommy didn't answer.

In all honesty, he didn't want to answer. He didn't want to talk to Dream, not after everything. Because now that he was finally out of that house, it was like his head was finally starting to clear.

Because Dream was... He... He was a bad person. No- yes- maybe a bad person. At the very least, not a good one. Because good people don't hurt children. Good people don't do what Dream did.

Tommy pressed one.

The robotic voice said something about the call being recorded, not that Tommy cared, and next thing he knew, he heard *his* voice.

“Tommy?”

It was like his throat closed up. He couldn't speak even if he wanted to.



“Tommy? Hello?”

His heart was pounding in his ears. He couldn't *breathe*. He didn't remember moving to his bed, but he felt himself collapse onto its soft covers.

“Hello?” Dream repeated.

Tommy forced himself to take a shuddering breath. “D-Dream?” He didn't mean to stutter, but he was terrified.

Why was he terrified? Dream was his- no, no, stop doing that. Techno had taught him better, he knew the truth now. He wasn't entirely sure what that truth was.

“There you are. Hi, Tommy.”

“H- hello, Dream...” He shouldn't have answered. Shouldn't have pressed one. It was too late, though.

“Look, I can't talk for long, but I wanted to call and wish you a happy birthday.”

“...Thank you.”

“I would have gotten you a gift, but...” Dream laughed.

“It's... fine.”

“I actually wanted to tell you something.”

Tommy didn't reply. Didn't need to. Dream continued talking anyway.

“My lawyers are working to reduce my sentence. Maybe get me out of here altogether.”

No.

No, no, no, that couldn't be happening. Not after what Tommy said. Not after what Dream did.

Quackity had assured him that Dream would be locked away for a very long time. That was half of the reason Tommy testified against him in the first place, because he knew he'd be safe.

"What, no comment? You aren't happy for me?"

He wasn't. "I just... I wasn't expecting..."

"It's fine. I know I did some things to you that I regret. I took things too far. But, still... it's been lonely in here, you know. No one's visited me."

When Tommy made no attempt to respond, Dream continued.

"I feel like I've been abandoned, and it sucks. I'm sure you know how being abandoned feels, don't you, Tommy? After your deadbeat family-"

"Don't you dare refer to them like that." Tommy snapped in a sudden burst of courage

"My apologies. But surely you know what I mean. They left you, after all. Nobody wanted you."

"I..." the burst of courage went as quickly as it came.

"Even Technoblade did. Don't you think it's a little weird he wants you for no reason?"

"He's not... He isn't..."

"All I'm saying is that it seems a little suspicious, is all."

"You're... You're wrong, Dream."

"I'm wrong?" There was that trace of anger in his voice. Tommy hated it, knew it meant a punishment but... He couldn't, could he? Dream was in prison.

Not for much longer. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean it like that."

"That's what I thought."

Tommy's hands were shaking. He wanted to hang up the phone. Why didn't he just hang up?

"So... How's your ankle?" The anger was gone, replaced with concern. Why did Dream's emotions have to switch so quickly?

"It's fine..."

"You sound like you don't want to talk. I'm not keeping you from something, am I?"

His first instinct was to lie. He *should* have lied, he wasn't sure why he didn't. "I'm having a birthday party. You called in the middle of it."

"A party? Aren't you a little old for those?"

"I... Techno says that even adults have parties."

"He's just saying that because he feels bad."

"Why... Why would he- no, no, it doesn't matter. Dream, what do you want?"

"I want you to visit me." He stated, plainly.

Oh. That... That wasn't so bad. Tommy had it in the back of his mind that Dream would ask him to break him out of jail, which was obviously ridiculous.

But still, he didn't want to visit Dream. Not after everything Dream had done.

What had Dream done, really? Punish him for his own wrongdoings? Teach him the best way he knew how? Dream was doing his best, even if Techno said what he was doing was wrong.

Wait, no, because Technoblade was very smart. Techoblade would know. But Dream was smart, too.

"I don't... I don't know if that's a good idea."

"What, you don't want to see me?"

"No, no, I do." He wasn't sure what percentage of that was a lie and what was truth. "But I don't know if I'd even be allowed to."

"You're allowed to."

"Technoblade wouldn't like me coming."

"Technoblade isn't in charge of you. I am."

Controlling was a good way to describe Dream. Overbearing was how he referred to it to his friends. Dream wanted complete control over Tommy.

Tommy didn't want to be under his control anymore.

He didn't, right?

He took a deep breath. "How did you get my number, Dream?"

Dream let out a small chuckle. "I have my ways."

"How did you get my number?" He repeated, harsher, now. He wasn't scared anymore. He wasn't going to be with Dream. Dream was in jail, Dream-

"Friend of a friend tracked it down. You really shouldn't have so much personal information on the internet, you know."

Had he put personal info out there? Maybe on some gaming website, to his old school friends. But that... That wasn't public. Was it?

"Alright, this has been fun, Tommy, it really has. If you really want to get back to your little party, go ahead." Usually, when Dream spoke like that, it meant that Tommy didn't have a choice. Not really, anyway.

This time... He did. Dream was in prison. Dream couldn't hurt him. He could do what he wanted. "I do."

There was a long silence. "Alright then, Tommy. Have fun, I guess." He could hear the disappointment clear as day, and he wanted nothing more than to melt under it, to apologize and keep talking to Dream. He refused to, though. This time *he* was in charge.

"Okay. Bye, Dream."

"Oh, and Tommy?" He didn't wait for a response. "I hope to see you soon. At the very least, I'll call you soon."

The line went dead.

Tommy couldn't breathe.

He was having a panic attack, his brain supplied. He had been getting them at least once a week, according to Technoblade. But Techno or Tubbo or occasionally even Ranboo were always there to help him through it.

He couldn't face them now. Not after that. Dream wouldn't want him to talk to people.

No, no, Dream wasn't in charge, remember? He could talk to whoever he wanted. No, not that, either. Techno was in charge, and he wouldn't want Tommy speaking to Dream.

His head hurt. He wanted a nap.

Tommy waited a few minutes to catch his breath before wiping the tears out of his eyes (had he been crying?) and leaving.

He didn't think he looked like he had cried, but Techno picked up on something being off immediately. So, of course, Tommy lied. He didn't want to lie. Lying was wrong. Lying got you punished, and he didn't want to be punished.

He forced a smile and talked about Aaron, one of the kids he hung out with from time to time at his old school. Aaron was a good enough lie, and Techno seemed to believe it.

Tommy pushed thoughts of Dream out of his head for the rest of the night. They only resurfaced when Techno went to bed.

Tommy paced back and forth in his own room, his cane leaned up against the wall. That thing was annoying to use, and besides, the pain was grounding him as he thought.

Dream was supposed to be in prison for five years. Dream had legally been sentenced for five years. He had done something bad, and the judge confirmed it. They had *proof*. How would lawyers get him out? That didn't make sense. Maybe Dream was lying... But why? He had no reason to.

Dream was also angry at him. He didn't sound it so much over the phone, but Tommy knew. He wasn't supposed to tell people. That was the one (of many) rule(s), and Tommy had broken it. Shattered it, even, like the frame to his old photo of him and Wilbur.

He missed that photo. It was one of the last happy memories. Phil didn't have a replacement.

Stop it. Stop thinking about that. Wilbur was gone, but Dream wasn't.

He was terrified of Dream. Dream...

Dream knew his number. Knew where he lived. Probably even where he went to school. Dream could be outside his window right now, coming to kidnap Tommy. Maybe to kill him. Dream could be out right now, plotting revenge, and-

Tommy wasn't sure at what point he ended up at Techno's door. Wasn't sure why he knocked instead of just turning around and going back to his own room.

Well, no, he knew why. He didn't want to admit it, but he was scared of Dream.

But Techno? Techno wasn't afraid of Dream. Techno was big, and he was strong, and he could protect Tommy.

He slept in Technoblade's bed that night. He was incredibly grateful that Techno didn't ask why in the morning.

Tommy decided not to tell him about Dream calling. Techno *hated* Dream. He constantly talked about how bad Dream was, or tried to explain to Tommy what he did wrong.

Tommy wasn't sure how much Techno was right. On some things, sure. His broken ankle was an example of when Dream was wrong. But every punishment? There was no way. How else would Tommy learn?

Maybe that's why he kept pushing against Techno's rules. Because he *should* have been punished by now, but Techno had barely done so much as to raise his voice at him. It was weird, confusing, uncomfortable. Even Wilbur would yell at him and send him to his room. But Techno didn't do any of that.

He wasn't sure whether that was a good thing or not.

Tommy sat on the couch, feet propped up on the coffee table Techno had bought. He'd been told at least a dozen times to not put his feet up there, but since he wasn't going to get punished, there wasn't really a point in listening.

Techno stood in the kitchen. His hair was pulled up into a bun, his glasses hung off a chain on his neck, and he had an apron over his pajamas. He looked ridiculous. Tommy would've

teased him for it, but he was making blueberry pancakes, and for the first time in years, Tommy felt a little hungry for breakfast.

“Phil’s coming over today.” Techno said.

“Again?”

“Again. Said your birthday gift finally arrived today, so he wants to give it to you.”

“He knows he doesn’t have to-”

“He knows. He wants to.”

Tommy took a deep breath. “I don’t think Phil likes me very much.”

Techno’s face... Well, it was hard to explain what Techno’s expression morphed into. Sadness, maybe? That wasn’t quite it, but Tommy wasn’t sure he fully understood it, anyway. “He does. He just doesn’t know how to show it.”

“Wilbur told me about him, you know. Talked about all the adventures you would go on before I was born.”

“Did he?”

Tommy nodded. He grabbed his cane and used it to push himself to his feet and make his way over to Techno. His hand brushed lightly over the chains of beads tied around the top of the shaft. He knew that the decorations were dumb- he’d been told that by plenty of kids at school- but he didn’t want to take it off. It was a nice reminder that he had friends. That people cared. That Dream was wrong.

He didn’t want to keep talking about Phil. That man wasn’t his father, not really. Even Wilbur had said that. Instead, he switched the conversation topic.

“Is the present like a dog or something?” Tommy asked, looking up at Technoblade with an exaggerated hopeful expression.

“No, Tommy, it’s not a dog. We can’t have dogs in the apartment.”

“I think I’d like a dog.” He continued, as if Techno hadn’t spoken.

“We can’t get a-”

“I’d get a dog and I’d name it *Clementine*.”

He could see the trace of a smile on Techno’s face. “What if it was a boy?”

“I’d still name it Clementine. It’s a good name.”

“For a boy dog?”

“It’s better than Technoblade.”

“Okay, first off,” He slid the spatula under a pancake as he spoke, starting to flip it, “I didn’t choose the name Technoblade. Secondly-”

Tommy waited for a few seconds, then frowned.

Techno had been doing this a lot, lately. Just... Spacing out. His eyes going glassy, staring at nothing. He trailed off mid-sentence and then afterwards insisted to Tommy that he was completely fine.

If Tommy was being honest, it scared him. Because something was *clearly* wrong, and as far as Tommy was aware, it just kept getting worse. Maybe not worse. They never lasted longer than thirty seconds, but they happened more and more frequently.

What if Techno was- no, no, no, stop that train of thought. Techno was okay. He said he was okay, so he was okay. End of discussion.

“The spatula’s going to burn if you leave it there.” Tommy muttered, not quite sure what to do.

It took ten more seconds (yes, Tommy counted) before Techno moved again. He took a sharp breath before flipping the (now slightly burnt) pancake.

“Techno...” Tommy said, soft as he could manage. He couldn’t look Techno in the eyes. Scratch that, he couldn’t look at Techno.

It was unfair. That every time he looked at his brother, he saw Wilbur’s face staring back at him. And yes, it was different, but it was still too similar. And the last time he had seen Wilbur’s face staring at him...

“I don’t want you burning the pancakes. You should sit, I’ll take it from here.”



Techno was probably just getting a cold or something. Maybe the flu? Tommy knew next to nothing about sickness, so maybe this was a usual symptom. Something completely normal that he shouldn't panic about.

Strangely enough, he doubted it.

He thought Techno would argue. That he'd argue against Tommy's suggestion, claim he was fine, but instead he just sighed and made his way to the couch.

For some reason, that startled Tommy even more.

He quickly went about finishing cooking the pancakes, adding extra whipped cream on both of them for an added bonus.

Shortly after, they were both seated at the table, across from one another. Tommy was trying to be subtle about it, but was watching Techno like a hawk, looking for any other signs of sickness. He *did* look tired, but he was always tired. His hands weren't shaking or anything, which was good. He wasn't coughing or sneezing or anything. Maybe Tommy *was* overreacting.

"Why do you keep doing that?" He asked, looking Technoblade right in the eyes.

"Doing what?"

"Spacing out."

"I have ADHD, Tommy, I just-"

"It's different though, isn't it? Because you're spacing out in the middle of sentences."

"I just lose focus sometimes. It isn't a big deal."

Tommy stared at him, narrowing his eyes slightly. "You're lying."

"No, I'm not."

"It's a big deal, Techno."

"It really isn't. Everyone spaces out sometimes-"

"It's all the time, though!"

"Tommy-"

“What? It *is*. You did it while cooking, you did it last night, and on the phone, and at the store, and who knows how many other times and I just haven’t noticed.” He was speaking more quickly now, and even he could hear the fear rising in his own voice. He was getting louder, too. This outburst had been building up for a while.

“Tommy-” Techno tried again.

“What if it happens when you’re doing something important? At work, or something?”

“It-”

“What if it happens when you’re driving?” He yelled.

The kitchen was silent. The house was silent. The entire apartment complex was silent, probably, as Tommy’s words sunk in.

He hadn’t meant it. Well... He had, sort of. Ever since Techno’s ‘space-outs’ as he had taken to calling them had become more frequent, Tommy had been thinking about that.

They never found the truck driver that hit Wilbur’s car. It was classified as a hit and run. The cops said it was probably because the driver was distracted by something and not looking at the road.

Just like Techno would be if it happened when he drove.

“Tommy...”

“What if you *died*, Technoblade?” He shouted. Techno looked hurt, but he wasn’t quite done yet. He dropped his voice to a regular speaking tone. “I don’t want to lose you, too.”

Techno’s expression dropped. He had gone from looking upset to... Sympathy? Pity? Whatever it was, Tommy hated it. Because that meant Techno didn’t really care, that he was just worried for Tommy, and Tommy did *not* want, much less need, his pity.

“Technoblade never dies.” Techno gave him a slight smile, as if it was some sort of joke. If it was a joke, it wasn’t very funny.

“Shut up.”

“That’s rude, Tommy.” Techno said it like... A chiding parent. Yeah. And oh, how Tommy hated it.

He pushed down anger. “Techno I’m serious about this. You... What if this is something serious? A brain-eating ah-mo-be-uh or something?”

“An amo- Tommy, look, I’m fine.”

He wanted to grab Techno by the shoulders and scream ‘no, clearly you’re not’ at him. He refrained.

“Can you please at least make a doctors appointment?”

“I don’t need-”

“If you don’t, I’ll tell Phil.” It was a little funny, how scared Techno was of Phil. Not... Not actually scared. Not like how Tommy- no, that was unimportant. But it was clear Techno still respected Phil as a father, even if he wasn’t a child anymore.

“Fine, I’ll make an appointment. Happy?”

The pancakes were cold, now. The hunger he felt had disappeared. He was pretty sure he’d be sick if he ate now.

“Yeah.”

Techno ate in silence after that. Tommy just mashed his pancake and whipped cream together with his fork.

Phil came a few hours later, a green bucket hat atop his head that Tommy vaguely recognized from a picture in Techno’s room. He held a large gift-wrapped package in both his hands, setting it down to ruffle Tommy’s hair after walking in.

He didn’t mention Tommy’s cane, which Tommy actually appreciated. His ankle hurt worse than usual today, so he really needed it to get around. Not that he’d ever admit it.

They sat in Tommy's room to open the present. Techno was in the living room to 'give them privacy'. He didn't want privacy, but whatever.

Tommy made himself comfortable on his desk chair as Phil sat on Tommy's unmade bed.

"Tommy, I... I'm sorry. I am so, *so* sorry for... For everything, I guess." Phil said. It seemed like the more he spoke, the faster the words came. "I ignored you practically your whole life, only to hand you over to *Dream*," Tommy noted how he said his name with venom, "And now even though you're here I *still* haven't even kind of made it up to you. I couldn't even get you your birthday gift on time, for crying out loud, I mean, what kind of a father does that?"

Tommy stared at him for a long moment. "It's... It's fine, Phil. I didn't expect you to--"

"That's the *problem*, Tommy, you *should* expect me to."

"I... I'm sorry?"

"No, *I'm* sorry. I truly am, I just..." Phil sighed and shook his head. "Doesn't matter. Your present." He passed over the wrapped present to Tommy, who took it carefully. It was covered in wrapping paper with a pattern of balloons. On the front was written 'happy belated birthday'.

Tommy glanced at Phil, not sure if he was supposed to open it yet, or wait, or... No, Phil had nodded at him. So, slowly he unwrapped the paper in the annoying careful way adults did, as if they were saving the wrapping paper for later. Once the paper was off, he was staring at a black case.

A black, guitar shaped case. Covered in stickers. Familiar stickers.

He stared at it for a long moment, lost in memory.

When he was five, he got stickers in kindergarten. He would save them and bring them for Wilbur to put on the case. Wilbur had other, cooler stickers, too, of course. Ones with cartoon cats and video game characters and music notes and whales and computers and dogs and dozens of other ones, but they didn't matter because Tommy had been five and his big brother was letting him help decorate his most prized possession.

His fingers brushed over the stickers lightly. Most were faded, some were peeling.

He felt tears prick his eyes, but he refused to cry. Not in front of Phil.

“You kept his case.” He whispered in awe. He... He honestly had no idea what had happened to it. He figured that it had been thrown away after Wilbur died. After everything Will had told him about Phil, he felt he had every right to assume.

“That’s not all, Mate. Open it up.”

Carefully, he laid the case on the ground. He flipped the latches on the side open, and ever-so-reverently pulled open the lid, and...

He was going to cry. He thought he’d never see the guitar again. He really did, but here it was, in all its guitar-y glory. Wilbur’s old acoustic guitar, the light brown spruce wood shone in the case.

It felt wrong to touch it. Like it was breaking some unspoken rule. Wilbur would always play guitar for him, but he’d rarely let Tommy play. He was all possessive about it, but Tommy had never found out why.

With more care than he’d ever had in his life, he lifted the guitar out of the case and set it on his lap like he had seen Wilbur do many times. He draped his arm over the top of the guitar, copying movements Wilbur had taught him years and years ago.

He let his hand drift across the strings, and,

He wanted to laugh. He wanted to sob.

“It’s out of tune.” He murmured.

“I... Haven’t really touched it since... You know. Just... Be careful with it, okay? I don’t know much about guitars, but the strings might break.”

“I don’t want to break it.” Tommy said, quickly moving to put it back in its case, where it belonged.

It didn't really belong there. It belonged in Wilbur's hands, but it was much too late for that.

Phil put a hand on his shoulder before he could.

"We can get the strings replaced."

"But they're Wilbur's strings..."

"I know. But..." Phil paused, taking a shaky breath. Tommy pretended not to notice the streaks of tears down the man's face. "Music is meant to be played. Wilbur always said that. He would- I- he would've wanted you to have it. To play it."

Tommy bit his lip and slowly pulled the guitar back onto his legs. "I don't know how."

"I'll look into lessons."

"Really?"

"Of course."

He looked back down at the guitar, plucking a few strings.

"Thank you, Phil."

Phil stayed for lunch and then well into the afternoon. He talked about how he was going on a trip to Egypt soon for work. Tommy still wasn't quite sure what he did for work, other than travel, but didn't feel like asking.

And then Phil did something that surprised him. Phil talked about how he'd like to bring Tommy on a trip to England one day.

Wilbur loved England. Tommy, by extension, also loved it. Well, he loved Wilbur's stories of it, anyway, and that was enough for him.

The idea that Phil would bring him there? Even if he had to wait for Tommy to be officially adopted to go? That was... Weird. But a good kind of weird.

Once Phil left, Techno asked to see the guitar. Tommy was hesitant to even take it out of the case, but eventually they came to an agreement.

They stood in Tommy's room as he opened the guitar case.

Techno's eyes were wide when he saw the guitar. He looked... Shocked. Yeah, that was a good word for it. Tommy knew it was just surprise, but his brain was convinced it was anger.

"Phil gave it to me." Tommy said, quickly, panic welling up in his throat. No, no, no, please no. Don't let *this* be the start of everything going downhill. He was okay if Techno wanted to scream at him, or punch him, or destroy literally anything else, but Wilbur's guitar? He couldn't let him do that. *Wouldn't* let him do that. "I can give it back to him, but please don't break it."

"Why would I- no, no, I'm not going to break it, Theseus."

Tommy narrowed his eyes slightly.

Techno continued. "I'm just... Surprised he gave this one to you, is all."

"Why? I know it was Wilbur's and all, but he said Wilbur would've wanted me to have it."

He nodded and gave Tommy a grim smile. "He would've. I just... I thought he would give you one of his electrics or something, not this one."

"Why not this one? It was the one he always played."

"Yeah, it was... But it was mom's before it was Wilbur's."

Mom.

He had never met her. He didn't grieve her like Wilbur and Techno and Phil did. And why would he? He didn't know her. That came off meaner than he meant, because it was nothing against her. He knew she was wonderful just based on how everyone spoke about her, but he didn't know her... Phil did.

Phil loved mom. Loved her more than anything else in the world. When Tommy took that away from him, he was angry.

It took him far too long to realize that Phil blamed him for it. Wilbur had sheltered him from that idea, for the most part. He'd always come up with a million excuses for Phil to explain why he had been so distant from Tommy, why he didn't want to come to birthday parties, whatever.

And then Dream offhandedly mentioned Tommy 'killing' his mother, and it all clicked into place.

He didn't kill her. Not... Not really. Kind of... He didn't know. It was weird, and not in a good way. It made him uncomfortable to think about, so he tried not to.

It wasn't his fault, but it was. Phil had every right to blame him for it. Techno did, too, honestly. Even Will did, even though if he did, he never showed it.

"...Why would Phil give it to me, then?"

"Because he loves you."

"Does he, really?"

"He does."

They stared at the guitar for what felt like ages. As if they waited long enough, maybe Wilbur would come back. Maybe he'd burst through the door and shout to ask what they were doing with his guitar, take it out of Tommy's room, and hide it away in his own. Maybe Wilbur would smile at them and offer to play them a song. One of the songs he had been writing, but never finished. Did Phil still have his notebook? He'd have to ask.

Wilbur... He wasn't going to come through the door. He wasn't going to play them songs. They'd remain unfinished, and the thought broke Tommy's heart.

But at the same time... Maybe it was okay.

Because Tommy was safe. Tommy was home. Techno loved him, Techno cared for him, Techno wanted him. And it seemed Phil did, too.

And maybe that was enough.



## Chapter End Notes

I was going to wait till tomorrow to post this, but turns out im impatient and want the serotonin that comes from posting a chapter

on another note, i've seen people recommending this fic (and a hundred miles) on tiktok?? that's insane what-

the second half of this chapter is dedicated to that user with the armadillo thomas the tank engine(???) pfp, president of the phil hater club /lh

# the damage's already done, isn't it

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Routine came easily. Wake up, get Tommy ready for school, eat breakfast, send Tommy off to school, go to work, come home, have dinner, and then spend time doing whatever. He used to spend the time between dinner and bedtime reading, but now, more often than not, it was a movie or game night with Tommy. Sometimes Tubbo would come over, who, on rare occasion, would bring Schlatt with him.

And it was fine. It was good. Techno like routine- he always had, and after the mess he'd dealt with when Tommy originally came, it felt wonderful to get back in routine again.

Tommy usually was home before Techno. No, not usually, *always*. He'd take the bus home with Tubbo, and then hang out with the kid until Techno got home. Whether or not Tubbo had picked up on their whole not-leaving-Tommy-by-himself thing or it was just his personality was debatable, but either way, Tubbo wouldn't leave his side unless Techno or Schlatt was with him.

He wasn't surprised when he came home from work, a week after Tommy's fifteenth birthday, to find the apartment empty. Tommy must've been at Tubbo's, which was fine by Techno, because he would love some peace and quiet to read. He should've spent his time cleaning instead, as the house really needed it, but he figured he deserved a little bit of a break.

There was this book he had been meaning to read ages ago, but hadn't had the chance for obvious reasons.

Techno had barely settled down on the couch with his book when there was a knock at the door.

Not the banging of police or Dream. Not the raps of Tubbo. Not the only-two-knocks of Phil, or shave-and-a-haircut from Schlatt. Tommy didn't knock on the door, so it wasn't him, either.

It was four knocks in quick succession, all loud and assertive.

Techno was never going to get a break, was he?

He opened the door of his apartment to find...

A woman? She wore semi-professional clothes, her hair was pulled up in a bun much neater than Technoblade's, and she was carrying a clipboard and pen. She looked important. She also looked familiar, though he couldn't tell from where.

"Hi, Technoblade. I'm here for the inspection. Do you mind if I come in?"

"Uh..." He paused as the reason *why* she looked so familiar clicked into place.

This was Tommy's social worker. Alyssa, she had said her name was. She was in charge of the final inspection of Techno's house, making sure Tommy was completely safe, before they could finalize the adoption papers. This was the last step to the whole process, and Techno had made the appointment for her to come over a week ago.

He completely forgot she was supposed to come.

"Yeah, yeah, of course. Uh... Come in." Techno quickly stepped back from the door, swinging it open a little wider for her to walk in.

She stepped inside with a grimace, and it was easy to see why.

Technoblade wasn't messy. He wasn't, okay? But the only two people living in the apartment were himself and a teenage boy, of course things weren't the pinnacle of cleanliness.

The sink was filled with dirty dishes, thanks to Tommy pulling him into some made up card game last night ("it's like Uno, but better, trust me", he had said), and by the time they finished, it was much too late. He was going to get around to it at... Some point. The dirty dishes were only the beginning. Cards still lay scattered across the floor, half covered by a

blanket Tommy had thrown over them in a rush to get to school that morning. Foam Nerf bullets littered the floor.

“Sorry for the mess, it’s usually cleaner, I promise.” He forced out an awkward chuckle that she didn’t return.

Instead, she scribbled something down on her clipboard. “Do you mind if I take a look around?”

He gave her permission, and she went right into what must’ve been her routine. Starting with the kitchen.

They talked as she looked through the half-empty cupboards and fridge. He answered questions that felt useless, like ‘what do you usually feed him’ and ‘how does he like it here’. They kept talking about Tommy as they made their tour around the apartment.

‘How is he settling into life here?’ Great. He struggled in the beginning, but they’re getting there.

‘What is your usual routine?’ Breakfast, school, homework, hang-out.

‘What do you do if he breaks a rule?’ Talk about it? He was trying to be pretty lax after Dream’s entire deal.

‘How are you dealing with his trauma?’ ...Carefully.

‘Does he see a physical therapist for his ankle?’ No, but Techno had been meaning to look into that.

“And how about a therapist for mental health?” She asked. After looking in Tommy’s room, they had made their way back to the kitchen to chat.

“I... No, not yet.” Techno admitted. “He’s just so stubborn, I-” He stopped, mid-sentence. It wasn’t because of a blackout this time, no, it was because the front door opened, and Tommy came stumbling in.

‘Stumbling’ was harsh. But Tommy’s limp seemed worse today, especially as Tommy pushed his way into the apartment.

“Techno!” Tommy shouted, despite being maybe six yards away from his brother. “You’ll never guess what happened at school today!”

Hang on, why was Tommy limping? He brought his cane to school, Techno recalled.

Tommy continued, despite not receiving an answer, voice enthusiastic as ever. “I got in a fight! You should’ve seen it, Techno- I sucker punched this guy like you told me, and... And... Why’s she here?” The enthusiasm fell.

This was awkward. Not just awkward, this was *bad*. Because now not only could he see Tommy in full, but the social worker could, too.

His hair was messy and caked in mud, the knees of his jeans were torn, a bruise was on his cheek, and there was a steady stream of blood leaking from his nose.

"Tommy! Oh my- what happened?" Techno rushed forward, but Tommy stepped back.

"Why's she here?" He repeated.

Before Techno could answer, the social worker stepped forward. "Hi, Thomas. It's alright if you don't remember me. My name's Alyssa-"

Tommy cut her off. "I don't care what your name is."

She continued like it was nothing. "I'm here to check up on you, make sure this house is... Safe." She must've been staring at the blood on his face. Or, maybe the blood that had dripped down onto his shirt. “Sorry, you said your brother told you to punch someone?”

“No, no, he told me *how* to punch him, not *to* punch him.”

“Right. And was he encouraging you to punch him?”

Tommy shrugged.

She simply sighed. "Would you like to get cleaned up before we chat?"

Tommy looked at Alyssa for a moment, then to Technoblade. He looked... Hurt? But Techno wasn't sure why.

"Yeah, whatever." He grumbled before limping his way into the bathroom. Techno made a mental note to ask what he'd done with his cane later.

"His ankle seems to be hurting him." She noted, though he wished she didn't.

"He has a cane to help him walk. I... I'm not sure what he's done with it." He said honestly.

They lapsed into silence after that.

It took twenty minutes for Tommy to come out, still wearing the ripped jeans and blood-stained shirt, but the blood was cleaned off his face and tissue was shoved up his nose to stop the bleeding.

"I'd like to talk to Tommy in private, if that's alright."

"Yeah, yeah, that's fine. You can go in his room if you want."

The door was closed behind them, and after a minute, Techno sunk into the couch.

He'd screwed up, hadn't he? Clearly he had. He should've remembered when she was coming, should've been cleaning regularly anyway, shouldn't have let Tommy get into apparently a fight.

Was it really his fault, though? Tommy should've been cleaning, too...

It took half an hour for them to come out. Not them, just Alyssa. Tommy stayed in his room.

"Technoblade, may I have a word with you?"

He quickly stood up as she made her way over.

"I can tell you're trying your best. We try our hardest to not let kids be taken from their biological family."

He let out a breath of relief.

"But sometimes, our 'best' isn't good enough."

Oh.

"If Thomas is growing up in an unclean environment that promotes fighting, doesn't enforce rules, and isn't accommodating health issues, he'll have to be removed from the home."

"No, no, please don't do that. I swear, it's not like that, you just caught us on a bad day-"

"I'll have no choice."

He failed.

That's what he did- he failed.

He failed to keep both his brothers safe, he'd failed doing what he had promised to do. He hated the feeling of failure.

"But, again, we try not to take kids from their biological family, even if it's siblings. You have three days to get this house in order."

He paused, staring straight at her.

"What?"

"Three days. Clean up the house, put your rules in order, get him a new cane, physical therapy, and a therapist. I'll be back on Thursday for another examination." She walked to the door. "I hope you do better next time, I really do." And with that, she left.

Techno didn't have anger issues. As far as he was aware, no one in the family did.

Sometimes, he just got... frustrated. Angry. Upset. Panicked, even. Sometimes he didn't know where to place his anger, nor where to let it out.

Which is why he found himself opening the door to Tommy's room without knocking.

"Do you *want* to get sent back, Tommy?" Techno shouted. He knew he'd regret it later but he didn't care. Because Tommy couldn't get it through his thick skull that what he was doing wasn't okay. "Because that's what's going to happen if you keep acting like that!"

"It wasn't on purpose! I didn't know she was there until I was already talking!"

"And then you continued!"

"She asked!"

Techno pinched the bridge of his nose. "Sometimes, you don't have to tell every detail about something. It's okay to leave things out."

Tommy looked up at him with wide eyes, then quickly nodded, his anger dropping. "I... I know. I'm sorry, Tech, I really am. I- I can make it up to you, I'll clean the house, I'll do dishes, whatever you want."

Techno just shook his head. "The damage's already done, isn't it?"

And then Tommy was panicking again. It had become a fairly regular thing at this point, for Techno to accidentally set Tommy off by accidentally saying or doing something, but it was enough of a surprise to melt his anger into concern.

"Theseus, breathe. You're alright. Stop panicking, I'm not going to hurt you."

Tommy had buried his head into his hands, taking shuddering breaths that were much too fast. "No- no, you can- you can do that, it's okay." He muttered.

"I'm not. No one's going to hurt you. You're safe here."

"You should. You can. Please, it would be better than that. I don't even care." His words were rushed together.

"Relax, I'm not-"

"Just hit me already!"

"I'm not going to hit you!"

Tommy removed his head from his hands, looking straight up at him.

"It's been three months. I've annoyed you every single day. If- if you hit me, you'll feel better. Then you won't have to send me to foster care. Then you won't have to send me back to Dream."

For what had to be the fifth time that day, Techno's heart dropped.



Techno had made a mistake, getting mad at him. He should've realized. Whatever Dream had done ran deeper than he thought.

Therapy. He'd make an appointment as soon as he was done with this conversation.

"Oh, Tommy..." It was weird. He was still angry, he really was, but this was more important. He could place that anger aside for now. "I didn't mean to scare you. Look, you're not going into foster care, you're *certainly* not going back to Dream."

"Dream wants me to go back."

"What are you talking about?"

"Dream... He cares about me, you know. He misses me."

"How do you know that?"

Tommy dropped the eye-contact. "Because why wouldn't he?"

"He... He misses having someone to manipulate. He never actually loved you, you know." The words felt too harsh, even as he was saying them, but he didn't know how else to say it other than bluntly. "He took you in with bad intentions. He doesn't miss you."

"He's my friend."

"He's your abuser."

He took another shuddering breath. "I don't want to talk about this anymore."

A therapy appointment.

"Would you talk about it with someone else?"

Tommy shook his head.

"Okay... Okay." It wasn't okay. "We'll figure something out later, then."

He took this moment to look at his brother. To *actually* look at him. Tommy, with his messy blonde hair and his bright blue eyes. Tommy, with a light bruise on his cheek and tissue in his

nose to stop the bleeding. Tommy, with blood on his shirt and ripped jeans...

"Do you want to change clothes?"

"Not really."

Techno sighed, moving a little closer to him. "You said you got in a fight, earlier. Want to tell me what happened?"

"I already told Alyssa."

"Yeah, but you seemed excited to tell me about it earlier."

Tommy shrugged. "I thought you'd want to know."

"...I do. Tell me about it."

Apparently, Tommy had gotten into a fight after school. Telling the story got him just as animated as he was originally, the panic of earlier seemingly forgotten.

"So it wasn't my fault, I swear."

Techno wasn't convinced.

"They were being mean to Ranboo, stealin' his books and stuff and making fun of him. Something about his parents, I dunno, I wasn't listening. But I thought I'd tell them to stop, since I'm a big guy, you know? I could've scared them off."

"Them. Multiple?"

Tommy nodded. "Like, four or so. From my English class. But I only fought the head guy."

"Tommy, tell me you didn't just go off and punch someone..." Techno had grown up in fighting sports, sure, but even he thought school fights were a little too far.

"No! I'm not an animal, Technoblade. No, I asked them to stop and to give him his notebook back. And then I *told* them to stop, and they didn't."

"Right..."

"So I punched him. Square in the jaw. Like you taught me."

Techno let out a sharp breath.

Technically, yes, Techno *did* teach Tommy to throw a punch.

Here's the thing, Tommy had been... Well, there was no sugarcoating it. Tommy had been abused for years. And even if he claimed he wasn't afraid of Dream anymore, it was obvious by his cries at night that it wasn't true, even if he denied that happening.

Techno thought that a good way to give him peace of mind would be to teach him how to fight. How to throw a punch. Stuff like that. They had gone to a gym and Techno had started teaching him a few basic skills of self defense.

He hadn't expected Tommy to use those skills to get into school fights.

"And then he punched me, and we got into a fight."

Techno nodded slightly. "Okay..."

"They didn't get Ranboo, at least. I made sure of that. I... Don't tell him, but I didn't want him to get hurt." Tommy whispered the last part like it was a secret.

He nodded again. "Of course. So, you got into a fight... He punched you in the nose?"

"Yeah. It's not broken, I don't think. Just won't stop bleeding."

This child, who apparently didn't realize that bleeding meant something bad, was going to be the death of him. He prayed that it was just stupidity, and not something Dream had deliberately made him believe.

"Want me to take a look at it?"

Tommy narrowed his eyes slightly. "What if I say no?"

"Then I won't look at it? But if you bleed out, that's on you."

"I wouldn't bleed out. I'm much too big of a man to." A beat, then, "You can look at it if you want."

They ended up in the bathroom, Tommy sitting on the counter, eye-level with Technoblade. A first aid kit was set out next to them, despite the fact that they didn't really need it. All they

really needed was an ice pack for the bruise, and unless Tommy got sick from it, they could wait out the bloody nose.

“What happened to your cane?”

Tommy frowned, muttering something he couldn't make out.

“What was that?”

“I said I lost it.”

“How do you lose a whole cane?”

He shrugged. “...I set it down and forgot about it.”

“Mhm.” Techno gave him an unbelieving look. “And if I ask Ranboo, is he going to tell me the same thing?”

Tommy squirmed under his gaze. “I... Yeah, yeah, he will.”

“So if I call him, right now?”

He was quiet for a long moment. “They took it.”

“Who?”

“Sa- the group of guys.”

“They've been making fun of you for it, haven't they?” Tommy had never outright said that was what happened, but Techno thought it was a pretty fair assumption.

“...Yeah.”

“And then they stole your cane today?”

“Yeah.”

Oh. The anger was back. Not at Tommy, thank goodness, but at the group of kids. And he knew he shouldn't be this angry, because they were dumb teenagers, but clearly there was at least some malice behind the actions. “What are their names? I'll call the school, we'll get the cane back, get them in trouble.”

Tommy shook his head quickly. “You can't do that.”

“They stole your stuff, they beat you up-”

“I hit them first. I'm lucky they didn't tell the principal themselves.”

“Theseus-”

“Did you ever make your doctor’s appointment, Techno?” Tommy changed the subject quickly, but more importantly, Tommy was... Was Tommy accusing him?

“I...” He could just lie, but that felt wrong.

“You said you’d make one.”

“I’m going to. I just haven’t yet.”

“*Technoblade.*”

“I’m *going* to. *You* try making an appointment using teacher’s insurance.”

“Call them.”

“Excuse me?”

“Call them now, since you were going to, anyway.”

“Tommy, you’re my brother, I’m in charge of you, you’re not going to boss me around.”

“We’re brothers, you’re not in charge of me. No one’s in charge of me.”

Set some rules, the social worker had said.

“I’m your legal guardian, I’m about to adopt you. *I* am in charge of you.”

“No you’re not. Not really, I-”

“Go to your room.”

A beat.

“What?”

Another beat.

“You’ve been nothing but disrespectful all week. And now you got into a fight? Tommy, you’re acting like a child.”

“I’m not acting like a child! I just-”

“Go to your room.” He repeated.

Tommy’s face fell. He pushed himself off of the counter and made his way to his room. Techno ignored the slam of the bedroom door behind him.

They didn’t eat dinner together that night. They didn’t watch a movie or play games, either.

Techno knew he was being too harsh. He was, really, but he didn’t know what else to do. Tommy wasn’t necessarily wrong about the doctor thing, but Techno was so tired of him pushing for it. He was *fine*. He was, really.

The fight was too much. He still should call the school, maybe call Ranboo’s parents (who he had yet to meet) and ask what they knew about the fight. If they knew who it was with, or anything like that. He had told Tommy he would protect him, and he managed to fail at that.

He shouldn’t have taken it out on Tommy.

He made his way to Tommy’s room, about to knock on the door, when he heard quiet talking.

“I don’t know if... I haven’t asked... He’d say no.” It was difficult to make out Tommy’s words, but every once in a while there was a space of silence. Tommy was talking to someone on his phone, clearly. Maybe Tubbo? Or Aaron, who he had been calling about once a week as of late.

“I think... Prison... No, I wouldn’t... You’re lying...”

That was... Concerning.

“Techno... I got in a fight... No, you- I think... Grounded me... It’s different.”

Should he knock on the door? Tommy didn’t necessarily sound upset, but... No, it would be rude. Plus, he would have to admit to listening in on Tommy’s private conversation, which felt like a way to make him more upset. He’d apologize in the morning.

Or... Not.

Because when morning rolled around, Tommy was already dressed for school and heading out the door before Techno could get a word in.

“Where are you going?”

“Ranboo’s. I have a project to work on before school.”

“You didn’t tell me-”

“You said I didn’t need to ask permission to hang out with friends.”

He *had* said that. “I also said you need to let me know where you’re going.”

“Well I’m going to Ranboo’s.”

“Tommy, wait, I-” The door swung closed. “I don’t even know where Ranboo lives.” Is what he was going to say.

This... This was going to be a long day.

He should’ve gone home as soon as he was finished with classes. He’d be there to meet Tommy as soon as he got home, and he could apologize and make it up to him. Instead, he stayed, holed up in his office, hoping to work in the quiet.

Techno wasn’t even working on his actual job. Instead, he was researching therapists, physical therapists, and doctors. Yes, doctors. He had told Tommy he was going to make an appointment, and he meant it. He just... Needed to deal with Tommy’s situation first. It was more urgent, considering they had three (now two) days to work everything out.

He found himself lost in the research. Child psychologists, child therapist, child behavior therapists... Was Tommy even considered a child anymore? He acted like one, sure, but he was fifteen. Technically he was a teenager. He switched his search term to ‘youth therapists’ before continuing down the rabbit hole.

It was hard to find anyone. Those who worked with teenagers only dealt with basic issues, while those who worked with things like trauma and abuse (he briefly wondered if there was a chance Tommy had PTSD, before filing that thought away for later) only worked with adults.

At one point, he noticed someone who specialized with ‘grief, loss, and bereavement’. He wondered if he should recommend them to Phil. He was pretty sure Phil didn’t have any therapy when they lost mom, and full-out refused it when they lost Wilbur. Techno had done the same. Maybe a family therapy-

There was a knock at his office door before it opened slightly.

It was the same kid as a few weeks ago. What was his name again?

“Hi, sorry, is this a bad time?”

Yes. “Of course not. You can come in.”

“Thanks.” Carson (no, that wasn’t it) crossed the room and sat across his desk from him. “Sorry, I won’t be here long, I promise. I just saw you graded my essay and I was wondering why I only got a sixty?” Cooper (that wasn’t it either) handed him the papers.

Techno pushed his glasses up slightly before taking them and skimming the words, trying to remember what this one was about. “Well, a few spelling errors, first off. You didn’t cite your sources... Yeah, mostly stuff like that. Also, this fact right here is completely wrong.” He pointed at a paragraph, looking up to find Connor (there we go, that’s his name) staring at a photo on his wall.

It was the photo Tommy had tried to steal months ago, of Wilbur and him as children. Well, Tommy was a child, Wilbur was barely a teenager at the time.

“I remember you mentioned you had a brother once. Is that you and him?” Connor asked, gesturing to the picture.

“Uh... They’re both my brothers, actually.”

“You have a twin?”

Techno let out a sigh. “Had a twin.” He corrected. “He passed away a few years ago.”

“Oh, I’m sorry. Were you close?”

“Not as close as we used to be. He moved out to raise the blonde kid there, Tommy, and we didn’t talk as much after that.”



“Oh...”

“Yeah.”

“So... What happened to Tommy, then?”

“What?”

“Well, you said your brother raised him, and then a while ago you mentioned family issues. Is everything okay?”

Techno considered himself a private person, especially when it came to sharing his life with his students. They knew about Phil, and they knew about his martial arts past, and that was about it.

Still, it would be nice to talk to *someone* about some of the things going on. As long as he was vague about it.

“He’s alright. I... I’m adopting him, actually.”

“Oh! That’s great.” He said with just a little hesitancy, like he wasn’t sure it was great or not.

“Yeah, it is. But the whole process is... A lot.”

“I’ve heard it’s insane. I have a friend who’s brother adopted a kid... Or something like that, anyway. But it sounded like a long process.”

He nodded. “You have no idea.”

“You want to talk about it?”

“What, about the adoption process?”

“Yeah. You look like you need to vent.”

He really did need to vent. And if Connor was offering... Obviously, he wouldn’t go into detail on anything. He didn’t talk about the abuse, or the fights, or court, or anything. Just about the adoption process and social workers and stuff to that extent. It was nice, and a good break from the research he’d been doing.

“...Thanks for this, Connor. This was... Surprisingly nice.”

“Yeah, of course. I actually should head out, it’s getting late.”

Was it? Six PM... Oh, he should've been home hours ago. "Yeah, me, too."

They parted ways, and for the first time in a while, it felt like a slight weight had been lifted off his shoulders. It was easier to talk to Connor about this stuff than it was to Phil, which was... Surprising. He didn't question it, though.

Tommy was home alone when Techno got back. A missed text from Schlatt confirmed that Tommy wanted to be alone, and Schlatt didn't want to push it. Whatever, that was fine.

"Tommy, I'm home." Techno called. Another surprise- Tommy was standing in the living room, looking straight at Techno.

"Techno?" He asked. He looked nervous, fidgeting slightly, but clearly trying to stay calm.

"Yeah?"

"Can I visit Dream in prison?"

## Chapter End Notes

I edited this in a hurry, so if you saw mistakes no you didn't

anyways i thrive off your comments, so thoughts? theories? predictions? just want to say hi?

I've got a pretty sound idea for where this is going to go now, we're looking at 13/14 chapters, I think, so that's... fun? I dunno

# there it is

## Chapter Notes

speedrunning these chapters faster than dream

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“No.”

“Techno-”

“No, you’re not visiting Dream in prison.”

“I want to-”

“I said no, Theseus.”

Techno wouldn’t even let him get a word in. It wasn’t *fair*. It was *not* fair, Techno was being controlling. Techno was being mean. Techno had pulled a one-eighty after that social worker visited. He was acting more like Dream now, which was somehow both comforting and terrifying.

It was painfully familiar. The arguing turning into yelling turning into punishments. Dream did the same thing. Hey, Techno even locked Tommy in his room last night.

No, not really. The door locked from the inside, not the outside. Techno couldn’t lock Tommy inside.

Still, he had sent Tommy to his room with no instruction of when he was allowed to leave. It wasn’t all bad, though. He still had his phone.

Dream had called him again.

They talked about life. Tommy told him about school, about the fight. He left out mentions of his cane, and especially of Tubbo and Ranboo. He didn’t want Dream to know about them. In turn, Dream told him about life in prison.

It sounded lonely. Sad.

It reminded him of when he first moved in with Dream.

Back in middle school, they talked about the difference between sympathy and empathy. Sympathy was feeling bad for someone, while empathy was feeling bad with someone. Or something like that, anyway. He wasn't sure if he felt sympathy or empathy for Dream.

Still, he felt bad enough to want to try and visit.

"Why not?"

"You... You're not being serious right now, are you?"

"I am. Why can't I visit him? Give me a reason."

"How about this: because he abused you."

He didn't. It wasn't abuse. It was... Uh... He wasn't sure. But it wasn't abuse. The more he spoke to Dream, the more he was sure of the fact.

Dream... He had done some things wrong. He wasn't perfect, but no one was, right?

It wasn't like he was going to go back to Dream. He did *not* want to go back to Dream. He just wanted to talk to him. To get some kind of closure.

"I want to see him."

"Tommy, I'm not having this conversation with you."

"Yes, you are." Tommy grabbed Techno's sleeve, as if that would stop him from moving away. "I want to visit Dream."

"And as your legal guardian, I'm telling you no."

"He's in prison, Techno! It's not like he can hurt me or anything!"

"Tommy, three months ago you were begging me to take you away from him, you shouldn't want to see him at all."

“It’s different now!”

Tommy hadn’t told Techno about the phone calls. Of course he hadn’t. Deep down, he knew that they were wrong. That he shouldn’t be talking to Dream. If he told Techno, he’d put a stop to them immediately.

He wasn’t sure he wanted them to stop.

Dream had hurt him. Dream would’ve killed him. eventually.

Sometimes Tommy missed Dream so badly it hurt. Which was weird. It was wrong, and he knew it was, but the longer he spent away from Dream, the harder it was to remember what made living with him so bad.

Maybe visiting the prison would fix that.

“Tommy, I have two days to get you a new cane, a therapist, a physical therapist, and about a hundred other things. You want to stay here, don’t you?”

“I... Yeah?”

“I need you to clean the living room. I don’t... I didn’t mean to snap at you like I did. Right now, and back when the social worker came.” It was at that moment it sunk in just how exhausted Techno looked. When was the last time he slept? “I don’t want to lose you again, so making sure everything’s good on the adoption-front is my top priority. Does that make sense?”

Tommy hated when people asked if something made sense. Even if he didn’t, he always felt like he was being talked down to. Like a child.

Still, he nodded.

“I’m going to go to my room and make some phone calls. Can you handle cleaning the living room?”

“Yeah, Tech. Don’t even worry about it.” He replied, because what else was he supposed to say?

Techno went back into his room. Tommy pretended not to hear the click of the door locking behind him. He probably wasn’t even making important calls, just talking to Phil. Wilbur had talked about that a long time ago. How Techno was Phil’s favorite, which is why Tommy and Will needed to stick together.

But Phil was trying to be better now, wasn’t he? He had given him the guitar, which apparently was a family heirloom (or something like that, Tommy wasn’t quite sure how it worked).

Phil... Phil *was* trying to be better. Tommy could see it whenever Phil talked to him, how he would be extra nice and kind even when Tommy was rude back.

He hated to say it- but he could use that to his advantage.

After all, Techno might’ve been his guardian, but Phil was his father.

It took forty-five minutes to clean the living room to the extent that he thought Techno would find acceptable. Tommy spent most of those forty-five minutes developing a plan of what to do in the back of his head as he worked.

He hunkered down in his room to call Phil. He wanted to call Dream first, but apparently the prison didn’t accept phone calls, so he would have to wait for Dream to call him. That was fine.

His chest ached. This was wrong. This was bad. Dream had hurt him. Technoblade was just trying to help him. He didn’t *need* to visit Dream, he shouldn’t *want* to visit Dream. He *definitely* shouldn’t call Phil.

Tommy was having doubts. Ever since the first phone call, he had been having them.

Because why would Techno want him? Techno hated him, at least, he should. Technoblade didn't want to deal with the screaming child who told him that he hated him in the hospital. He didn't want to deal with the quiet one at the funeral. And he didn't want to deal with whatever mess the current Tommy was now. So why did he take Tommy in?

That was the thing. The big, overarching problem. Because Tommy had no idea why Techno would've done something like that.

But Dream? Dream seemed to know. At the very least, he had theories that could help Tommy figure out the truth. Because it certainly wasn't out of the kindness of his heart.

Every Friday, Techno would put him on a phone call with Phil. They'd chat about useless things. The weather, or animals Tommy saw, or what it was like in whatever country Phil was visiting.

It was Tuesday, days too early for the phone call.

"Hello? Is everything alright? Is Techno okay?" Of course the first thing Phil would ask would be about Techno.

"Yeah, he's fine. Everything's fine. Are you busy?"

A pause, then, "Of course not, mate. What's up?"

"Can you not tell Techno I called you?"

"Uh... Sure, I guess." His answer was much more hesitant this time.

"I was... Could you... I need a favor, Phil. I need to do something really important and Techno won't let me."

"Well, what do you need to do?"

"Promise you won't tell Techno?" Techno wouldn't like either of them going behind his back, but he would be angrier to find out what Tommy was doing in general.

"I promise."

"I want you to take me to visit Dream in prison."

Dead silence.

"For closure. Techno won't let me, but..." He added.

Tommy considered himself to be very prideful. He hated looking sad or making people pity him. But, if it would help him see Dream...

"But I just can't believe he's really in jail." He continued. "I know I saw him, I'd actually be able to sleep at night without worrying about it."

"I see... And Techno already told you no?"

"Just because he's so busy and stressed. He wants to, but he doesn't have time to." Was Phil buying this? He couldn't tell.

"Right..." Phil let out a sigh, and then, "Which prison is he in?"

Probably too fast, he answered. "Wyoming State Penitentiary. It's a little under two hours away from here."

"I'll see what I can do, yeah?"

"Thank you, Phil."

"Don't mention it. Oh, while I have you here- I heard you lost your cane?" Of course Techno had told Phil. He wasn't even surprised.

"Yeah..."

"I got you a new one. I was thinking I could bring it over tomorrow?"

He didn't want a gift from Phil. He was only supposed to accept presents from Dream (or Techno, now, he guessed), and even those had a chance of being taken away afterwards. But... It was different now, wasn't it? Techno had let him keep the guitar.

"Can you do that and then we go visit Dream?"

"I'm not really sure if that's.. I'll see what I can do." He said again. "I can't make any promises, though. I'm sure there's lots of rules and paperwork and stuff."

"Oh, I looked it up already." He had briefly looked into it, anyway. He knew that a child's guardians had to sign paperwork to let someone else accompany him. "I'll ask Techno to sign the paperwork, so it won't be a huge deal for you." He wasn't going to ask Techno.

Years ago, maybe around the age of seven, Tommy learned to forge Wilbur's signature. It was a big, loopy, over-the-top signature, and it took him weeks to perfect it. He couldn't even remember why he learned it, probably to lie to teachers or something. Either way, that was where his forging career started.



It came in handy to learn Dream's signature, too. He only used it when teachers needed Dream to sign off for things like detention, but Tommy had been twelve, and desperately trying to avoid punishments. When Dream found out... He wasn't happy. Tommy didn't like to think about it.

He hadn't forged a signature since.

It would be worth it, though. Even if Techno punished him after.

"Are you sure?"

"Positive. I actually better get going, but Phil?"

"Yeah, Tommy?"

"Thank you, really." He meant it this time. "And, uh, don't mention this to Techno. I don't want him to get more stressed than he already is."

"Of course, mate."

He hung up the phone and sat in silence for a moment. It took a few shaky breaths before he could think clearly enough to do anything.

He was going to visit Dream.

Phil was going to take him to visit Dream.

That was good. Bad. neutral? He didn't know.

Dream wanted him to visit. But Dream wasn't a good guardian. He had hurt Tommy. Tommy shouldn't want to see him.... But he did. He didn't know what to make of that.

----

The next day, Techno didn't sleep. For once, *Tommy* was the brother reminding the other to eat. Technoblade would rarely even talk to him if it wasn't about something that stupid social worker wanted him to do.

"I made a physical therapy appointment for you next week, to help your ankle." Techno told him the next morning.

"Do you have any preference for a therapist?" He asked.

"I don't want-"

"You're going. Just try it for, like, a month. Please?"

"Come here, I want you to look at canes."

"Phil said he was bringing me a cane today."

"Oh... Okay, then."

Techno was also cleaning like crazy in the evenings. Shuffling between doing dishes, laundry, and picking up the living room and bathroom. All of it had been cleaned already, but Techno was going above and beyond whatever standards had been set before.

To top it all off, Techno was more snappy now. He'd get annoyed at Tommy more easily. Occasionally, he'd just take a deep breath and send Tommy to his room. Usually, they'd just get into an argument that forced Tommy to hold back a panic attack.

It reminded him of Wilbur. All Techno needed now was a pack of cigarettes, maybe a glass of bourbon... That was mean. Don't speak ill of the dead and all that.

Phil told him in private that he wasn't able to get an appointment at the prison, but they'd go Saturday instead, under the guise of taking Tommy shopping. Phil was surprisingly on board with keeping the prison thing a secret from Techno. Tommy was surprised, but he wasn't going to complain or even question it, either. Phil probably thought it was a bonding experience or something.

The cane Phil bought wasn't as good as the original one. Well, the quality wasn't worse, it was better, actually. This one was a cyan color (he didn't know Phil knew his favorite color), it was collapsible, and the handle fit nicely into his hand.

It didn't have the chains of beads (practically friendship bracelets) wrapped around it like his original one had.

Maybe that was a good thing. The chains were what made the group take it in the first place. Making fun of it, calling it childish and stupid and other, worse words. And then they took it from him, throwing it off... Somewhere.

He and Ranboo tried to look for it, but after thirty minutes and six missed calls from Tubbo (and two from Schlatt), they decided to call it quits and head home.

Tubbo made him new ones, but considering what had happened last time, Tommy wasn't sure he'd use them. Instead, they ended up as friendship bracelets tied around his wrists. Tubbo made himself and Ranboo some as well. It felt a little cringey, but Tommy wore them anywhere anyway.

It wasn't a big deal. The decorations weren't even the reason he got punched.

No, that was because of Ranboo. It wasn't actually Ranboo's fault, not really, despite the fact Tommy jokingly blamed him.

The guy who punched him was named Sapnap. He was... Well, he was a bully. He made fun of Tommy's friend group for everything, including but not limited to Ranboo's memory problems and the fact that he was adopted. Something about parental issues, but Tommy wasn't really listening when Ranboo told the stories. All he knew was that Sapnap was making fun of him for it, and that wasn't okay.

Tommy had politely asked him to stop.

Well, not politely. He had told him to 'piss off' as well as a few other less nice things. Sapnap told him to stay out of it, so he punched him.

Dream would've shouted at him for getting in a fight. He would've hurt him more than Sapnap did. But Techno was mostly kind about it. At least, until Tommy brought up the doctor's appointment. He stopped bringing it up after that. He pretended not to notice that the space-outs happened more often in the next two days.

And then the social worker was back, wearing another suit and carrying another clipboard as she trekked around the house. She made a few marks on the paper here and there, but nothing major. That was good.

Tommy had been dealing with these visits since he was six years old. He knew what the inspectors were looking for, and he knew by her face that this check-in was going better than the last.

At least, it was. Techno and her had been talking about something in the living room. Tommy wasn't really listening, until Techno trailed off again, mid-sentence.

Alyssa looked confused.

Tommy just sighed. "Give him a minute, he'll come back."

She frowned. "Does this happen often?"

'Sometimes, you don't have to tell every detail about something', Techno had said. 'It's okay to leave things out'. Tommy could interpret that as 'yes, Tommy, feel free to lie.'

"Not very often." Lie. "It's an ADHD thing, I think." Another lie.

"I see." She didn't sound convinced.

"He's got a doctor's appointment soon to make sure everything's okay." Yet another lie. He was quite certain Techno had made no such appointment, despite Tommy begging him to.

Within thirty seconds, Techno was back at it. Shaking it off like nothing happened, and though Alyssa looked concerned, she said nothing.

"Well, Technoblade, I'm glad to hear about the changes you've implemented." She said. "I can tell you really care about your brother. I'll put in for the adoption to be finalized, you'll have a few more papers to be signed, and then it'll be one-hundred percent official."

He could see the tension fall from Techno's shoulders. The way he visibly relaxed at her words.

At the same time, Tommy could feel himself tense. Adoption. Official. Finalized.

Techno was grinning.

Why wasn't Tommy happy?

----

It was a quiet drive to the prison. Phil didn't seem to know what to say, and Tommy didn't really want to talk.

For two whole hours, they sat in a car, silent, the only sounds were of the engine, the cars passing by, and the dull radio playing some station Tommy had never heard of.

Contrary to what someone might think, Tommy didn't really get nervous of cars, even after the car crash. He was fine with them for the most part.

Unless it was a truck of the same model that hit Wilbur. Unless it was raining. Unless they were at an intersection.

He couldn't count the number of times he had to squeeze his eyes shut and force himself to breathe as Dream snapped at him to stop freaking out, that he was fine. Granted, Dream had been completely right, but that never stopped the panic.

He wasn't panicking about the cars this time, though. He was panicking about meeting Dream. His heart raced as they went through security, signed papers, and all the other stuff they had to do before they were led to a concrete brick room. Through the small window, he could already see several tables. Was Dream already sitting at one, waiting for him? Probably.

"Can I talk to him alone?"

"Tommy, I'm not sure-"

“I want to talk to him alone.”

Phil relented, stepping back. “I’ll be right outside, then.”

“Okay.”

“And if it gets too much for you, you can always leave, okay?”

He nodded.

A prison guard led Tommy into the room, and he had to suppress a shiver. It was colder than he expected. Yeah, that was it, he shivered because he was cold, and not because he could see Dream waiting for him at a table.

There was a cut on his bottom lip. His hair, usually neatly pulled back, fell around his shoulders messily. He wore a bright orange jumpsuit.

How was it that, even now, he looked intimidating?

This was a bad idea.

He was led to the table, sitting down across from Dream.

“Tommy. Long time no see.” He sounded... Happy. Relieved, even, to see him. There were heavy undertones of exhaustion in his words.

“Hi, Dream.” There was no such happiness in his own voice. He forced himself to take a few shaky breaths. He could get through this. He had to. It was his own fault (responsibility) that he was here in the first place.

“So... How’s Techno?”

“How’s prison?”

Dream sighed. “Are you really going to be like that?”

“No, sorry.”

“Good.”

Another shaky breath. "Last time you called, you said you wanted me to visit. I'm here. What do you want?"

Dream raised an eyebrow, then started talking like Tommy hadn't said anything. "I'm just surprised, is all. That Techno let you come. He seemed really angry at me last I saw him." He chuckled, gesturing to his nose, which was a little more crooked than Tommy remembered.

How many times can someone lie before it becomes a habit? "Well, he did."

"Really? Tommy, you know I don't like you lying to me." Dream leaned forward slightly, just enough to make the breath catch in Tommy's throat. In the corner of his vision, he could see a guard shift slightly, eyes on them.

"I know... I... I'm not lying."

"Mhm, sure. It doesn't matter, anyway. You want to know why I asked you to come?"

Tommy nodded slightly.

"I wanted to give you the good news in person." Dream grinned at him. It didn't reach his eyes.

"Good news?"

"Yeah. I'm getting out in three months."

He couldn't... There was no way. Five years. The judge said five years.

"It's amazing what a good lawyer and a lot of money will get for you." Dream laughed. Tommy was going to be sick.

"Dream..."

Dream dropped his voice to a whisper. "I'd love for you to come visit once I'm out of here, too."

"I don't... Techno wouldn't want me to."

"Oh, Tommy, come on now. You're not that stupid, are you? I thought I raised you better than that." He was using that tone again. It was sickly sweet, like honey, except there was still an edge to it.

"You didn't raise me, Dream."

"I did, actually. I took you in when your deadbeat family--"

"Don't talk about my family like that."

Dream stared at him for a long time. He blinked, slowly. “Look, Tommy, when I get out of here- and I will- you’re going to come back to me. I know you wouldn’t abandon me after everything I’ve done for you.”

“Really, Dream? What have you done for me?” He was incredibly grateful that the anger covered up the shaking in his voice.

“I gave you food. Clothes. A roof over your head. I kept you company. I was the only person there for you when your family abandoned you. Uh, uh, don’t argue with me now,” Tommy couldn’t get a word in if he tried, “They did. And it feels awful to be abandoned, doesn’t it?”

Dream slowly reached his hands out, trying to grab Tommy’s hands (or, maybe his wrists).

“No touching!” A prison guard shouted, and immediately Dream’s hands flew back to his sides, raised upwards as if he was trying to prove his innocence.

“It feels awful to be abandoned.” Dream repeated, lowering his voice slightly. “Which is why I know you would never do that to me, would you?” It wasn’t a question.

“I... Techno adopted me. It’s official, I can’t do anything about it if I wanted to.”

“You really think he wants you?”

“Of course he does!” He did. Tommy knew he did.

“Oh, and what makes you think that?”

“Because he told me. He literally told me that he cared about me.”

“He’s manipulating you, Tommy. Can’t you see that?”

“That’s what he says about you.” Tommy grumbled.

“He’s lying to you. Come on, don’t be stupid, Tommy. Do you really think Techno had a sudden change of heart out of nowhere and decided to take you home?”

“I...” That’s exactly what he thought, actually. Now he was second-guessing himself. “No?”

“Good. So tell me, then, why do you think Techno took you in?”

Tommy paused at that. In all honesty, he didn’t know. Because even Wilbur said that Techno and Phil didn’t want him- that no one else would want to take care of him. He recalled those words being said a lot softer than they had originally, but that was fine.

“He... He took me in... Because...” Tommy started, not sure where the sentence was going. “Maybe it was out of pity..?”



“Think deeper, Tommy. Why would he take in his little *brother*?”

“Because... Uh... “ Tommy frowned. “He misses Wilbur.” That realization was confusing. It was like a puzzle falling into place, but Tommy still couldn't tell what the picture was.

"There it is." Dream leaned back, letting his hands drop onto the table.

No, wait. That didn't make sense. “But he's missed Wilbur for years. Why would he decide to take me in now?”

“You take a lot after your Wilbur, you know. That's not a compliment. I've worked hard to train it out of you, but it still lingers. When you ran away to him, he recognized Wilbur in you.”

He reminded Dream of Wilbur. Dream said it wasn't a compliment, but it felt like one. Because Wilbur was the best person Tommy had ever met. Wilbur was the first person to care for him. His brother was practically like a father. It felt nice to be compared to him.

“Technoblade's using you to replace Wilbur.” Dream said suddenly.

“What? No, that's-”

“Think about it, Tommy? He didn't want you. Phil certainly didn't. Think about those emails you sent them, how they never responded? Why would they change?”

Tommy frowned. He had a point. Maybe if he were thinking clearer, he would've remembered the emails were a secret. That he had never told Dream about them.

Dream laughed again. “It's sad, honestly. After all this time, they're not over Wilbur's death.”

“You think... They're replacing Wilbur with me?” The idea of that hurt.

“Of course. Who better to fill the Wilbur-shaped hole in their hearts than his annoying little brother?”

“But... I'm not like Wilbur.”

“Oh, I'm sure they're realizing that now. Has Techno snapped at you yet? I remember how angry he used to get back in high school.” He had forgotten Dream and Techno used to be somewhat rivals. They never talked about it.

“He... A few times, yeah.”

“That’s how it starts. They’re realizing that you’re not Wilbur, that you’ll never be. And then what?”

Tommy felt tears prick his eyes.

He didn’t want to replace Wilbur. He *wasn’t* replacing Wilbur, that was stupid. But then again, why else would they want him? Technoblade always cared about Wilbur, not Tommy. Same for Phil. He hated how much sense it made.

“I don’t know...” He whispered.

“Then they send you away. To foster care, maybe. Where you’ll live out the next, what, four years? Completely unloved.”

“Please stop.”

“Of course, whoever fosters you will get rid of you as soon as you’re eighteen. Seventeen, maybe, depending on what state you’re in.”

“I don’t want to hear this.”

“But that’s not the end. You’ll be an adult, alone in the world. You’ll have no friends or family to help with college, probably get a dead-end minimum wage job.”

“Dream, stop it.”

“What? I’m just telling you how it’ll go.”

“I don’t... I don’t like when you do that.”

Dream had the audacity to smile like he did nothing wrong. “Alright. Let’s talk about something else, then.”

And they did. Or, Dream did, mostly. He talked about how awful prison was. How it could be scary, even, as there were no safe places inside. He spoke of how lonely he was, how Tommy was the first person to visit, and that had taken three months.

Tommy apologized for that. Even though he didn’t feel particularly sorry.

Dream briefly ‘complimented’ his cane. It was something Dream used to do a lot. He said it in a way that sounded like a compliment, but only made Tommy feel bad about it. Like saying how expensive it looked, how it didn’t really match his personality. How Dream

would've bought him something totally different (not that he would've bought him one in the first place).

The anxiety in his chest only grew as Dream kept talking. He couldn't stop thinking about what Dream had said. Was Techno really trying to replace Wilbur? He wouldn't. But why else would Techno take Tommy? That would explain why Techno had been so snippy at him, because Tommy was being annoying, and Wilbur was never annoying.

"I think our time is about up, Tommy. But before you go, I wanted to tell you something."

"Uh..."

"Do you remember my brother Punz?"

Tommy nodded.

"He doesn't live very far away from Technoblade. When Techno finally gets sick of you, you can go there, if you'd like. Who knows, I might even be there, too, if I can't find a place when I get out."

The idea of going back to Dream didn't sound very nice. And if Punz was anything like Dream, that wouldn't be ideal, either. But it was still an offer. A very kind, generous offer.

Dream was such a good g-

No.

Dream wasn't his guardian.

Technoblade was.

Technoblade had adopted him. Officially. There was no turning back.

But if Technoblade changed his mind, or if something bad happened... The knowledge that he had somewhere to go was comforting.

What about Tubbo's house? Or Ranboo's? Or Sam, Puffy, Niki, even Bad and Skeppy?

Most of those were too far. He wasn't going to burden Ranboo. He didn't want Tubbo to know about his issues.

It didn't matter, anyway. Because that wasn't going to happen.

"Thanks, Dream."

"Don't mention it."

Tommy gripped his cane tightly as he rose to his feet, glancing over at the guard nearest him.

"I'd like to leave now." He said, just loud enough the man could hear him.

"Oh, one last thing, Tommy?"

"Yeah?"

"I like your bracelets."

The car ride home was less silent.

"How'd it go?"

"It was fine." What would Phil want him to say? If he were Wilbur, what would- no, he wasn't going to think like that. Still, he lied. "I yelled at him. Told him how bad of a guardian he was."

"Oh, wow. That's great."

Tommy shrugged. "It's not a big deal."

"No, it is. Standing up to your abuser like that? It takes a lot of guts. I'm proud of you."

Had Phil ever told him he was proud before? He didn't think so.

"Thanks, Phil."

"Of course."

Neither told Technoblade of the visit. When he asked why they didn't bring anything home if they were shopping all day, Phil just told him they couldn't find anything Tommy liked enough. Apparently that was a good excuse.

Maybe Phil wasn't that bad.

But that didn't stop that feeling in his chest, it didn't quell the idea of them bringing him back into their lives only to replace Wilbur.

## Chapter End Notes

happiness? in my story? it's less likely than you'd think.

today, i offer you: things getting worse just a little faster. tomorrow? who knows

also: apologies to everyone who told me my work was realistic,,, i usually try to do research the best i can, but when it came to writing how long dream stayed in prison i threw it out the window.

# its the adhd

## Chapter Summary

TW: car crash

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The movie and game nights stopped rather suddenly. Tommy wasn't avoiding Techno as a whole, but it was clear he was at least trying to put some distance between them.

Tommy would leave early in the mornings (sometimes before Techno made it out to the living room), and stay late at school. Clubs, he said, then hanging out at Ranboo's house.

When he finally got home, he'd hide himself in his room to do homework. Techno often found himself leaving a plate of food outside his door, coming back later to find it barely half-eaten.

Tommy was dropping weight again (of course he was, he was never around for Techno to force him to eat). He was pulling away from Techno, avoiding calls with anyone but Aaron, and flinching at every sudden movement.

It was like almost every single way they'd progressed in the past months had been erased, and Techno had no idea what had caused it. Not even telling Tommy he had finally gotten a doctor's appointment set up (though it was still set a month away) cheered the kid up.

Wait.

Tommy had been acting like this for about a month, give or take. So... What happened a month ago?

Tommy got adopted, but he seemed so excited about that. He got in that fight, maybe that had sent him into a bad state of mind?

According to the therapist Techno got Tommy, he seemed completely fine. He didn't want to talk in depth about his abuse yet, but that was pretty normal. Things like that weren't usually spoken about immediately. That was fine.

The only other notable thing that happened was the shopping trip with Phil. The... six hour shopping trip... in which they bought nothing...

But Phil wouldn't hurt Tommy, would he? He wouldn't. There was no way. Not after everything he had said.

But he didn't didn't Dream would hurt Tommy, either, and he saw how well that turned out.

Techno made grilled cheese and tomato soup for dinner that night. He didn't even like grilled cheese, but Tommy did, and convincing Tommy to eat would be easier if it was something he liked.

He knocked lightly on the door.

"Can I come in?"

"Sure, I guess." was the muffled reply.

He pushed the door open and stepped inside. "I brought food." He tried.

Tommy was sat at his desk, laptop open in front of him, homework spread out across the table. He was in his chair, knees pulled up to his chest in a position that looked uncomfortable, though he didn't seem to mind.

"I'm not hungry. I have a lot of school I have to work on." He said, going back to his homework as if Techno couldn't see the phone on his lap.

He set the plate down on the desk anyway. "I can't remember the last time I saw you eat."

"Family dinner, last night."

"You took two bites and then excused yourself to a phone call."

Tommy bit his lip. "Are you mad at me?"

"Why would I be mad?"

He shrugged, turning back to his computer.

“Tommy... You know I... I...” Space-out. That would be the eighteenth today. Not that Techno had been counting. Once he came back to, he continued. “You know I want you to be friends with Phil, but... You don’t have to. You know that, right?”

“Yeah, I know.”

“And you know if anyone ever hurt you, you could tell me?”

“I know.”

“And you know if *Phil* ever hurt you, you could tell me? I wouldn’t be mad or anything, I promise. If he hurt you, it wouldn’t be *you* getting in trouble.” The words felt weak even as they left his mouth. He loved his father, he really did. And if Phil had done something to Tommy, he wasn’t sure what he’d actually do.

“I know.”

Did he have to be more blunt about this? He really didn’t want to be.

“Did... A month ago, when you went on your shopping trip with Phil, did something happen? Did he say or do something?” This situation felt scarily similar to a few months ago, when Tommy woke him up from a nightmare, only for Techno to ask him if Dream hurt him.

“No?” Tommy looked confused. “Did he tell you something?”

“No, no, just... Just wondering, is all.”

A voice in the back of his head reminded him that Tommy had said Dream didn’t hurt him, either. They had a whole court case to prove why that wasn’t true.

“Alright, if you say so.” He moved to sit on the edge of Tommy’s bed, having decided he wasn’t going to leave until Tommy finished dinner.

“There’s a cat.” Tommy didn’t turn from his laptop.

“What?”

“On the bed.”

“*What?*”



Sure enough, there *was* a cat on the bed. A brown, stripey creature, who technically shouldn't be allowed in the apartment complex, but was anyway. It had been a while since she snuck into their apartment.

"Tubbo's cat?"

Tommy nodded. "Her name's Bee. She's very polite."

Techno knew Tubbo's cat was named bee. He was more confused on why she was in Techno's apartment to begin with, but decided it wasn't worth questioning. He actually sat down this time, careful to avoid the cat. Tommy went back to typing whatever it was he was typing. It looked like a book report, maybe.

"Did *I* do something?"

"What do you mean?"

"You've been avoiding me." There. He said it. Point blank.

"No, I haven't."

"You have."

"I've been busy, big man." Tommy gestured to the pile of papers around him. "Homework. *You* try getting straight A's in ninth grade."

"I *did* get straight A's in ninth grade. So I know it doesn't take *this* much time."

Tommy glanced back at him. "That's because you're naturally smart. Doesn't count."

Techno sighed.

It wasn't worth it to fight. They had been doing that too much lately. It was weird, how they got along so much better before they were officially, legally, family.

He guessed they were always family. Tommy was always his little brother, after all, but it had never felt like it.

It was more like Phil was his father, Wilbur was his brother, and Tommy was the annoying kid who always was at their house.

Now it was different. Because Tommy *was* his brother, and he was appalled that he had never seen him that way before. Maybe if he had, they could've avoided the whole mess with Dream altogether.

His attention shifted to Wibur's guitar, which lay in its case in the corner, gently leaned against the wall.

"Have you practiced guitar yet today?"

Tommy shrugged slightly. "No, my fingers still hurt from my last lesson."

Phil had ended up finding him a guitar teacher. Though the words were never said, it was quite clear that they all thought the only person suitable for teaching Tommy guitar would've been Wilbur. They settled on some college student instead, who was remarkably good and got along well with Tommy. They gave him lessons on Mondays and Wednesdays, an hour each time.

Techno rolled his eyes. "That was four days ago."

"My fingers are all weak!" He exclaimed. "They could fall off at any moment."

"You know you won't get callouses unless you actually play, right?" He picked up the guitar case, taking note of the way Tommy tensed. Slowly, he laid it on the ground in front of him, opening the latches that kept it shut.

Tommy watched, but didn't say anything.

"Play me something?"

Tommy's expression flickered to something for just a moment. *What* it was, Techno wasn't sure, but it quickly changed to annoyance. "I know, like, three chords."

"Surely you can play a song in three chords."

"Not unless you want Riptide." He snorted. "Or Wonderwall."

"Either of those sound great. Please, Tommy? For me?"

"Are you sure?"

"Yeah."

Carefully, Tommy took his guitar out of the case, resting it on his lap. It looked much too large compared to him. He slowly moved his hand over the fretboard, hesitating before pressing on the strings. They were new, much better quality than Wilbur's old ones had been (Tommy had insisted on keeping the old ones, though. Techno was pretty sure they were kept safely in one of his desk drawers).

He strummed the strings with just a little too much force, and the chord rang out for barely a second before Tommy immediately slapped a hand over them to stop the noise.

"Sorry." He whispered.

"It's fine. Try again?"

More gently, this time, he played.

The chords were stilted and awkward. He accidentally muted strings that were supposed to be played, and played strings that were supposed to be muted. Often there would be dead notes, enough to make the whole chord sound off. It didn't sound good.

But it sounded like Tommy, and that was comforting.

Wilbur used to play guitar and sing to Tommy to get him to sleep as a child. Techno knew this, of course, because he used to sneak out of his own room to listen, hiding right outside of the doorway. Wilbur had picked up guitar so naturally that if Techno didn't know better, he would've thought Wilbur had been playing his whole life.

Tommy, on the other hand, wasn't a natural. He struggled and swore under his breath and couldn't even begin to sing with how out of beat the song was.

It was comforting, in a way.

----

Techno went to his appointment a week after, showing up early thanks to Tommy's insistence. The kid had really been pushing for this- reminding Techno of the date once, twice, even three times a day as the days grew closer.

It wasn't a big deal, he reminded himself. Even if Techno hated doctor's, he wasn't unfamiliar with them. Granted, that was usually just to check for concussions or sprains or other injuries sustained in fights, not... Whatever was going on now.

Ever since Wilbur died, though, it had been harder. The white walls and tile floors reminded him too much of that night. Even the heavy scent of hand sanitizer did.

He dreaded walking into that place. Even considered turning back a few times.

But this was for Tommy, so he continued on.

After going through the standard procedure, and explaining the space-outs, the doctor seemed... Less than impressed.

"You said you have ADHD, right?"

"Yeah."

"It's the ADHD."

That's what Techno wanted to brush it off as, too, but he had to face the facts.

"It's not. It's completely different than zoning out."

"You said you lose focus in the middle of conversations."

"Yes, but it's like... It's like I can't do anything for the time it's happening."

"It's your ADHD." They repeated. After Techno gave them a look, they added. "Maybe it could also be anxiety. Depression, even. Technoblade, when was the last time you went to see a psychologist?"

"It's, uh... it's been a few years." How long had it been? It was before he left for college, so...  
"I was seventeen, maybe?"

"I'll give you a recommendation for a psychologist, you can make an appointment with them, and we'll go from there."

"So I have to go through all that before you even consider it not being a mental thing?"

The doctor nodded. "Yes, it's standard procedure. Unless these space-outs are really bothering you or happening too often."

"I already said, it's not bothering me as much as it's bothering my brother. As for 'too often', it happens twenty times a day, I don't know..."

"I see. Look, if it's not impeding your daily life, then it should be fine. See a psychologist, and if they don't come up with anything, you can come back here for some more in-depth tests."

And... That was it. Not the answer he was expecting, nor the one he was particularly hoping for (not that he wanted something bad, but he did want an explanation).

Tommy was so upset when he found out the news. That Techno had just been offered a new prescription for his ADHD meds, and that was the end of it.

"That's bullsh-"

"Tommy!"

"What? It is! It's clearly not ADHD."

"I know, Tommy."

"So it's ridiculous that they would even *say* that."

"I agree."

"You should- wait, what?"

"I... Said I agree?"

"You... Agree with me?"

Was it really that surprising? "Yeah, I do. I'm not stupid, Tommy, I can tell when something's wrong with me."

"But you said... You didn't want to make the appointment."

He sighed. "I was busy with the adoption process. I was overwhelmed. Now? It's all good. I can put effort into dealing with... Whatever this is."

‘Whatever this is’ was a good way to put it. Because Techno had no idea. He didn’t even want to begin googling symptoms, sure that it would just tell him he was dying. At the same time, though, he didn’t have very many options. If his doctor was only going to blame it on the ADHD, he’d have to find some other way to figure out what was going on with him.

He wasn’t stupid. He had a doctorate for crying out loud. He knew that spacing out like that wasn’t normal, and he knew it could lead to dangerous situations.

Tommy’s panic about it happening while he was driving had freaked him out more than he would like to admit. Partially because Tommy was absolutely right, and partially because he could see the pure desperation in his brother’s eyes. Tommy couldn’t afford to lose another brother. It would be selfish to pretend that nothing was wrong. At this point, part of getting Tommy the help he needed meant getting himself help, too.

Apparently getting himself help was a long process. Between ridiculously far-off appointments and Google mostly telling him he was probably going to die, it wasn’t the most ideal process.

Doctors kept simply trying to change up his medication, too, and Techno tried his best to humor them. , but changing medications was an exhausting process. It left his thoughts more blurred together than they should, and it felt like each time he started to get used to it, they changed it again.

Months passed like seconds. Tommy still was somewhat isolating himself, but about once a week he’d play Techno guitar. Phil would stop by every other week or so, in between his other travels. Techno spent hours on phone calls with doctors and specialists and whoever else trying to figure out his black-out problem, but coming up with a blank every time.

“I need a break.” Techno announced to Tommy, pushing himself up off the couch. “And so do you. There’s this arcade that opened up down the street, want to go?”

Tommy had been sitting on the floor, mostly-completed essay spread across the coffee table. “Tubbo keeps talking about that. It’s supposed to be really cool.”

“Great, we’re going, then.” He was already grabbing for his car keys.

Tommy pushed himself to his feet before picking up his cane, twirling it in his hand before setting it on the floor.

Techno had managed to get him into physical therapy, but they only tried for about two months before their efforts were declared worthless. Not worthless, just... Useless. It didn’t seem to help with easing the pain, and his limp was still evident as ever. All it seemed to do was convince Tommy that he didn’t need the cane. Techno spent a few minutes most

mornings trying to convince Tommy to just use his cane in school, though Tommy always refused.

He was pretty sure it was the fear of losing this cane, too. It made sense, considering what happened to the last one (and what had happened with Dream), but it still hurt to see that his brother would rather deal with pain throughout the day than have the possibility of losing a cane worth maybe fifty dollars. At least Tommy was alright using the cane 'in public', for the most part, because Techno always worried when seeing the limp.

The arcade was surprisingly fun. Granted, it was crowded, dark, and loud, but still fun. After trying out the games for a while, Tommy insisted they split up for an hour to see who could win the most tickets.

Which is how Techno, a twenty-six year old man, found himself playing alone in an arcade. He wasn't competitive. He wasn't. He especially wasn't going to be competitive against his teenage brother. Although... Did he really want to *lose* this challenge to his teenage brother? Eh, he could at least sort of try.

He ended up with what he figured was a fair amount of tickets. Granted, he hadn't been to an arcade since he was around eleven, but it *felt* like a lot. And now, he just had to find Tommy.

Which was much easier said than done. Despite being insanely tall for his age, the kid was hard to find. After five minutes of searching, he decided just to text Tommy.

Three minutes went by with no response before he texted again. Still, he got nothing.

He called Tommy's phone. No answer.

Alarm bells were starting to go off in his head. Tommy always answered his phone, so why wasn't he...

Dream.

No, that was stupid. Dream was in jail and he would be for another, what, four and a half more years? Obviously, it wasn't Dream.

But it was something. Because he couldn't find Tommy, and he wasn't responding to texts, and oh, no, he must've been kidnapped.

No, that didn't make sense. Who would kidnap a five-foot-something loud fifteen year old? No one.

But what if something set Tommy off, and he panicked? What if he was *currently* panicking right now, and Techno wasn't there to help him.

He barely registered what he was doing before his phone was to his ear and Phil was answering.

He needed to call Phil less. He was an adult trying to do adult things, he shouldn't have to call his father every time he was worried about how he was raising Tommy. *Wilbur* certainly never did that.

"Hey, mate."

"I lost him."

"You... What?"

"I lost Tommy. I don't- I don't know where he went, and I-"

"Techno, take a deep breath. You're alright."

"I know I'm alright, but I don't know if *Tommy* is."

"Tommy's fine."

"You don't know-"

"He's not a toddler, Techno. He knows how to take care of himself better than most young adults do, honestly."

Techno forced himself to take a deep breath. "He's still missing, Phil."

"Well... Walk me through what happened."

Techno briefly explained how he took Tommy to the arcade, how they split up in an effort to earn a bunch of tickets. How Tommy wouldn't answer his phone and how Techno couldn't



see him anywhere. How he was even considering getting them to make an announcement over the speakers.

To his surprise, Phil laughed.

“He’s definitely fine. He’s probably in the middle of some game, he’ll call you back after.”

“Are you sure?”

“Positive.”

He sighed. “I just... I feel awful. We shouldn’t have split off in the first place.”

“Have I ever told you about the first time I lost you and Wilbur?”

“No..?”

“It was... In Greece, I think. Your mom wanted to pop in a shop and buy something quickly, and I said I’d watch you two. I turned my back for two seconds, and you both had disappeared.”

“I don’t remember that.”

“You were three, I think.”

Techno bit back a chuckle. “You lost two three year olds in Greece?”

“I did. And I nearly had a panic attack when I couldn’t find you. Until your mom came out and calmed me down, anyway.” He let that last sentence hang in the air for a moment before continuing. “Point is, we found you ten minutes later sitting on a bench eating lokma. I still don’t know where you got it from.” He laughed. “You both were fine. I hadn’t failed as a parent. If it ended up like that to toddlers in a foreign country, then I guarantee that he’s okay.”

It wasn’t incredibly calming, by any means, but at the very least it had stopped Techno from spiralling. Phil was right, in a way. Tommy was a teenager who definitely knew how to take care of himself. Still...

Call it parental instincts (brotherly instincts?), but something still felt off.

“What if he ran away?”

“Why would he run away, Techno?”

“I don’t know, he’s just been distant lately, I’m worried...”

“He only ran away from Dream because he was abusive. You’ve done nothing but be kind to him. I promise, he’d never run away.”

Techno felt a tap on his shoulder. He was about to step to the side to let the person pass, when he realized *who* had tapped his shoulder.

As if to prove his point, there was Tommy, standing in front of him. He looked a little paler than usual, but otherwise fine. Maybe Techno was right about the panic attack guess.

“Hey, Technoblade.” Tommy mumbled, holding out the ‘y’.

“Tommy... You didn’t answer your phone.”

“Sorry about that, I was... In the bathroom?” Obvious lie. Like, painfully obvious.

“For thirty minutes?”

Phil spoke up, loud enough that Techno missed whatever Tommy was saying. “You found him?”

“I did. He’s okay, thanks, Phil.” Tommy pulled a face, but Techno kept talking. “I’m going to let you go now, but again, thank you, really.”

“Of course, mate, don’t mention it.”

The call ended and he put his phone in his pocket.

“You disappeared.”

“I didn’t disappear! We split up, remember? For the tickets?”

“We agreed to an hour. I went to look for you and you were gone. I texted you and you didn’t answer.”

“Oh... I was on a call, so I guess it didn’t come through.”

Techno frowned. “On a call with who?”

“Aaron.” Of course. They called at least once a week at this point, each time, Tommy would hide in his room or whatever, not letting Techno listen into the conversation. It was private, he understood that, and was fine with it, but... It was still weird how secretive the kid was being about it.

“I see.”

“Are you mad at me?”

“No, I’m not mad, I was just...” Worried you got kidnapped? Worried you died? Or were having a panic attack? “Just don’t do it again, okay? Now come on, I want to see who got the most tickets.”

They ended up just short of five-hundred tickets, the majority which had been earned by Tommy, who, for some reason, was very good at the arcade games. Still, neither of them knew how much that was worth until they made it up to the prize counter.

Apparently, five-hundred tickets were worth a large brown and white plush cow (which Tommy named Henry immediately), two small nerf guns, and a handful of suckers and spider rings. Overall, it was a success.

It was already dark by the time they got to the car.

Something was wrong.

No, nothing was wrong. Everything was fine. Good. Great, actually. Tommy was happy. Techno was happy. So why did he feel so anxious?

He wasn’t having a panic attack. He knew what those felt like, and that’s not what this was. This was... Something else. He wasn’t sure what. Not a black-out, not anything, really. Maybe a side-effect from something or the other.

Tommy gave him a funny look as he buckled his seatbelt. “You good, Big Man?”

“I’m fine, just... Waiting for you to buckle up.”

“I’m literally already buckled in. Geez, Techno.” He teased.

He knew that. He definitely knew that, it just didn’t click.

They should’ve just walked. Home wasn’t that far. But Tommy was having a bad leg day, at least Techno assumed he had, because ‘we’re going to win the biggest prize, we’ll need the car to take it home’ was too cocky of a statement, even for Tommy.

So they took the car.

What happened next wasn't one of his space-outs. He could feel this coming. The way his hands started to lose their grip on the steering while, how his head positively spun, how he felt sick. He tried to pull the car over, to press on the brakes. He could hear Tommy yelling something, and then...

And then nothing.

This wasn't a space-out, this was something worse, because his entire consciousness stopped for... He didn't know how long.

When he came to, the first thing he noticed was the crack across the windshield. Then, the tree he had hit. He was lucky that he had been going slowly through a fairly residential area, because the car still looked relatively fine, all things considered.

He turned his attention to what was much more important- Tommy, who was still sitting in the passenger's seat, buckled in, staring straight ahead.

"Theseus, are you okay?"

Tommy didn't reply. He barely even blinked.

"Did you hit your head? Are you hurt?"

Again, no response. Just the sound of shallow breathing.

"I need to know if I should call nine-one-one, Theseus. You have to talk to me."

Nothing. Tommy said nothing. He didn't even act like he was hearing the words. Techno vaguely wondered if he *was* hearing them. From a quick visual scan, he didn't see any blood on Tommy, but that didn't mean he wasn't injured.

Without hesitation, he got out of the car and made his way over to Tommy's, pulling the door open. No acknowledgement of his existence whatsoever. Just a blank stare. It reminded him of Wilbur when he- Tommy wasn't a corpse. Stop that. Tommy was *fine*. Techno couldn't see any bruising on his face or head, nor his arms and legs. He looked physically okay. But mentally?

“Theseus.” He put a hand on Tommy’s arm lightly, trying to ground him without scaring him more. “Theseus, can you look at me?”

It took thirty seconds before Tommy looked at him. He didn’t move his head, just his eyes, but it was a start. At least, it would’ve been, had his eyes not immediately darted back to the floor in front of him.

“I’m going to check for bruises.” He said, not asked, since Tommy wasn’t responding to anything.

Or, apparently, he was. “I already called them.”

“Called who?”

It took a long moment for him to answer. “Nine-one-one.”

“When?” When he was unconscious, obviously. He wasn’t sure why he’d-

“While you were having a seizure.”

## Chapter End Notes

Whoo random thoughts and rambles at the end of the chapter time.

first off, this is probably my weakest chapter of this entire series. i just very much dont like the pacing or flow, but i dont really have the energy to re-write it.

second, things are going to get a lot darker from here on out? i thought i wanted to write fluff for 2.5 seconds and then decided that i simply will not do that

third, ironically enough, my brother got into a car accident whilst i was writing this chapter. He and everyone involved are okay, but let me tell you, hearing about it was startling

finally, as always, i adore reading your comments, so if yall have any thoughts/questions/theories i would love to hear them

# i want to go home

## Chapter Notes

dudududu

this isn't an april fools chapter or whatever, i just ended up speed running this chapter and thought i could post it early. as a treat.

not me forgetting to add a warning--

TW: mention of suicide/suicide notes, but no one is actually suicidal

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy didn't panic until he had hung up with nine-one-one. He was just well-functioning like that. Of course, as soon as they had the location and knew Techno was having a seizure, Tommy had hung up.

He couldn't talk. He couldn't breathe. All he could see was Techno- who was Wilbur- and he was bleeding. The car was upside down, but it wasn't, but the glass was still cracked (not shattered), and it didn't make any sense.

Techno (Wilbur?) was dead in the seat next to him. Except he wasn't dead, because he was convulsing, but that didn't make sense. Wilbur had been so still after the crash, so why was he- Techno- Wilbur- moving?

All that was lacking was the smell of blood. Because the blood *was* there. He could see it. On his hands, on the dashboard, on his brother. His brother he *killed*, again. He hadn't killed him, it wasn't his fault. But it was. It was, because he had been a distraction. But he... Hadn't even been talking to Techno? It still was his fault. It had to be.

He had vaguely heard Techno mention calling nine-one-one, but it took a while for him to process what he had actually said. Tommy forced a response that felt like ash in his throat as he said it.

They were taken to the hospital quickly. Not for any injuries, just for Techno's seizure.

Techno's seizure. A seizure, that's what it was. It had to have been, because it looked just like how they were shown on TV, and assuming TV was right, then that was the only option.

He really wished it wasn't the only option.

Tommy only spoke on the ambulance ride to chime in and fill in gaps that Techno left out.

At least it seemed Techno remembered everything leading up to the...

To the seizure, yeah. Not to the car accident. Not that, because if Tommy thought about that, he'd panic, and then he'd be of no use to anyone.

Regardless of whether Techno thought of him as a little brother or a Wilbur replacement, he needed his brother right now, and Tommy had to be there for him.

Tommy really didn't want to be there right now. Not when Techno was placed on a hospital bed, an IV needle in his arm (which apparently he didn't need and was 'just in case'). Not when he listened to the doctor drone on and on and ask a thousand questions to him and Techno (to which only Techno responded).

It wasn't raining, he reminded himself. The car hadn't flipped upside down, there was no truck. Techno was fine. Techno was breathing. Techno was... Currently talking to him.

"What?"

Techno gave him a look. "Are you sure you're okay? I know that you said you didn't need to be checked out, but if you hit your head or something-"

"I already said I didn't hit my head." Tommy snapped. He hadn't meant to sound so angry, he was just... Scared. Terrified, even. He was a big man, he shouldn't be this scared, but he was.

"You went full catatonic back there. Excuse me for being worried." There was no anger in Techno's voice. Just concern. Maybe pity. Tommy hated it.

"I'm okay."

"Do you want to talk about it?"

Techno proposed the question like a therapist would. Like *Tommy's* therapist would. Tommy didn't like his therapist, she was much too invasive and he would much rather discuss Moana

than Dream. At least Techno actually sounded concerned. Maybe that's why Tommy answered.

"Sometimes... Sometimes I look at you, and I see him." He mumbled.

"See... Who? Dream?"

He shook his head. "No, no. I... I see Wilbur." Ironical, really. Techno was using Tommy to replace Wilbur, but Tommy was the one who kept seeing Techno as him.

"You... Oh, Tommy..."

"It's just... When you were in the car, I couldn't-" He forced himself to take a shaky breath, to calm down. "It felt like that night Wilbur crashed."

"I know how you feel, I-"

"No, you don't. You weren't even there."

"Yeah, I was. I was at the hospital with you."

Tommy shook his head again. "No, I mean in the car. You weren't there when the accident happened."

"Neither were you."

Huh?

Did Techno really not know? Had the doctors never told him? Had *Phil* never told him?

Did it even matter? Not really, he figured. But, still, finding out that Technoblade hadn't even cared enough to learn the entire story of what had happened...

That wasn't the case, he reminded himself. Techno cared about him very much.

Techno only cared about him because he was trying to replace Wilbur.

He shook his head for the third time. "It doesn't matter. How are *you*, big man?"

"I'm... Fine."



“How long is all the testing going to take?”

Techno shrugged. “All night, it sounds like. They don’t want me driving, so Phil is coming to visit again for a few days.”

Tommy bit his lip slightly, staring at the floor by his feet. The tiles were shiny, probably having been recently cleaned. He didn’t particularly want Phil to visit. “You’re not... Dying, right?” He didn’t know how else to word it.

“Of course not. What happened back there-”

“The seizure,” Tommy cut in.

“The *seizure* was a one time thing.”

“You don’t know that.” He glanced at Technoblade before going back to the floor.

“I’m not epileptic, Tommy.”

“I heard the doctors talking. They said your space-outs were seizures.”

“They said they *could* be seizures, not that they *were*. That’s why they’re doing the testing.”

“Please don’t...” He started, but stopped, halfway through the sentence. “Techno?”

“Yeah?”

“I don’t want you to die.” He mumbled.

Techno let out a sigh. “I’m not going to die. I promise. Look... Come here.”

He patted the side of the hospital bed. Slowly, Tommy rose from the chair across from the bed he had previously been inhabiting, to the actual bed. Careful to leave plenty of space for Techno.

Techno wrapped an arm around him, pulling him into a side hug. It was... Okay. Slightly uncomfortable. But Techno’s arm was warm and the hospital was freezing, so he didn’t fight it. “I’m okay. You’re okay. Everyone’s okay.”

Except Wilbur.

“Okay.” Tommy murmured.

It took ages for Phil to show up. Some emergency contact he was. Immediately, the man went to talk to the doctors, something about... Well, Tommy wasn't sure. He didn't understand this medical stuff, most of it going fully over his head. He'd just ask Techno to explain it to him later.

Later. Because Techno would be fine. He wasn't bleeding out, he wasn't actively dying. There was plenty of time to ask him later.

"I'm gonna go for a walk." Tommy said, pushing himself out of Techno's arms and onto the stupid, shiny floor. Was he even allowed to wander the halls? Probably not, but he left before Techno could tell him not to.

This wasn't the same hospital Wilbur died in. He was grateful for that, even if they looked similar enough to give him chills.

Wilbur's hospital had magazines in the waiting room. And those weird wire toys where you slide the beads around. Even though he was technically a child at the time, Tommy had been much too anxious to even pretend to pay attention to those at the time.

Now, at Techno's hospital, he longed for any of those things. Eventually, he settled on staring at an aquarium that had been built into the wall. Tubbo had told him countless animal facts over the months Tommy had been there, but they had never been about fish, so Tommy really knew nothing specific about the creatures he was looking at.

Granted, he could just read the label underneath, sure it would explain what kinds of fish were there, but he couldn't bring himself to care.

Because he kept seeing the blood dripping down Wilbur's face. Down *Technoblade's* face. No, Techno hadn't bled. The windows hadn't smashed, so there was nothing that had cut him. All Techno was, was slightly bruised where the seat belt had caught him when they had hit the tree.

Tommy had been bruised for a month after the wreck. He had to change clothes in the dark because he couldn't stand to look at the reds and blacks that were such harsh reminders that he survived and that Wilbur didn't. It should've been him. That... That thought had come out of nowhere. He shook that thought from his head rather quickly.

In the months following, he got much more used to seeing bruises on himself. At least those bruises didn't remind him of Wilbur.

He could feel the bruises from this accident, but refused to look at them. He didn't want to think about that. He could assume they looked like Techno's, which meant he was most likely fine. They would be dull yellows instead of black and-

Right, he *wasn't* thinking about that. He was thinking about the fish swimming in circles in front of him. He wondered how the staff fed them, considering there was no way inside (that he could see, anyway). He wondered if Techno would ever let him get a pet fish. If Tubbo had a cat, surely the apartment building would let them have a fish. Maybe even a few fish, so the first fish could have a friend.

Maybe Techno would get a service dog, for the seizures.

If he survived.

Stop, that was stupid. Of *course* Techno would survive.

He went back to Techno's room half an hour later. The door was cracked open slightly, and he was about to enter, when he heard the talking.

"It's just... I don't know what to do." Techno said. He sounded stressed.

"You're smart. We'll figure out something." Phil replied. He sounded just as stressed as Technoblade did, if not more.

"But this on top of everything else?"

"What 'everything else'?"

"Just Tommy's whole... Thing. I don't know how to deal with him."

"You could-"

"I've tried therapists, doctors, everything. He went catatonic after the car crash. I'm not equipped to raise a child like this."

"No one is, Tech. But we learn."

"I won't have time to learn if I'm dealing with *seizures*. I just... Adopting him was harder than I thought it'd be."

“Raising kids is hard.”

“It’s not the same, dad.” Since when did Techno call Phil dad? “He has so much trauma and I don’t even know what to begin to do. I’m not *prepared* for this, Phil. Especially not if I’m forced to deal with my own medical issues.”

“Well... if it’s epilepsy, have you considered foster care?”

No. No, please, no. Techno wouldn’t.

“I’m not sending him to foster care.” Thank you, Technoblade.

“Not permanently, of course. Just while you’re getting adjusted, while you try to figure out how to handle everything.”

“I... I hadn’t thought about that. I don’t know... I guess I could consider... It’d be for his benefit, right?”

‘Then they send you away.’ Dream had said. ‘To foster care. Where you’ll live out the next four years completely unloved.’

Phil and Techno had sent him away before. What was keeping them from doing it again?

Tommy pushed the door open and stepped inside. Phil was sitting in Tommy’s chair, so he ended up just standing in the doorway.

“Hey, Tommy.” Phil said. Oh, so they were just going to pretend that their conversation didn’t happen. Sure.

“Hi, Phil.” Tommy replied.

“Techno and I were talking” Oh? “And I know you don’t like hospitals, so what if you had a sleepover with Tubbo tonight?” Oh.

“No, I’d rather stay here.”

“They don’t have a bed for you here, Tommy.” Techno said.

They were trying to get rid of him. He wasn’t going down without a fight. “I can sleep in a chair. I’ve slept in more uncomfortable places.”

“Really? Where?”

“The floor. A park bench. Dirt.”

“You’re a growing boy, you need to be sleeping in a bed.”

“I don’t want to leave you.” That was more forward than he meant it to be, but it wasn’t a lie, either.

This was the best living situation he’d had since before Wilbur died. Even Sam and Puffy, or that one foster home, didn’t compare to Techno. Because Techno was *nice* and Techno was *family* and he didn’t want to leave Techno.

Tommy spoke again. “I was thinking I could bring Wilbur’s guitar over, to play for Techno.”

“That...” Techno smiled a little. “That sounds nice, actually. If Phil wouldn’t mind taking you to get it.”

“I wouldn’t mind at all.” Phil’s smile was more strained, but it was there nonetheless.

They wanted Wilbur, that was clear. Tommy could at least try, right? Just to keep the family from falling apart.

But that was wrong, wasn’t it? Wilbur was dead. Tommy shouldn’t be replacing him. He didn’t *want* to replace him. But he didn’t want to be kicked out, either.

“There’s a lot of tests they need to do tonight, so maybe you could play for us tomorrow.” Techno suggested. Tommy could only remember a few off the list. Blood tests, EEG, something about an MRI, and several others Tommy couldn’t name. It was a lot. Techno would be here for a day, at least.

Someone must have said something in between that and Phil’s next words, but Tommy was barely paying attention.

“You’re really lucky you weren’t hurt in the accident.” Phil said, letting out a deep breath. “I was so worried when I got the call.”

Techno snorted. “Oh, I can imagine. I’m hoping they at least told you that I wasn’t hurt?”

“They did, but they followed it up by saying you had a seizure, so...”

“Gotcha. How was the plane right, by the way?”

They fell into easy conversation, with Tommy still standing uncomfortably near the doorway.

It was just another reminder that he wasn’t really part of this. Even if he was adopted, they could still give him away. This could be temporary.

He tuned back in as Techno’s words trailed off, his hand twitching slightly.

“Phil,” Tommy said. He wanted to look away, but he couldn’t.

Techno’s whole arm was shaking now. The same thing had happened in the car. It wouldn’t be long before his whole body was convulsing.

“Phil,” He spoke more urgently this time, “Phil he’s having another seizure.”

There were those convulsions. Phil pressed the call nurse button. Tommy couldn’t move. Couldn’t breathe. He was panicking. Arms wrapped around him, pulled him to the side so a nurse could get through, but they were far short of comforting.

He didn’t want to be here. Techno was dying. Wilbur died and now Techno was dying and he was terrified.

Someone (whether it was Phil or a doctor, he didn’t know) pulled him out of the room and into the hallway. Phil was standing next to him, holding the cane Tommy had all but forgotten about.

A nurse said something to Phil, but Tommy couldn’t hear over the ringing in his ears. And then there was a hand on his back, lightly pushing him towards the exit.

“Where are we going?”

“Home.” Phil was leading him outside.

Dream's? No. Techno's? Maybe. "I don't want to leave him."

"He's okay, Tommy. But you shouldn't be there while he's... He's okay." Phil was a brick wall to talk to when it came to serious things. Tommy knew this. Tommy hated this.

He didn't argue as Phil drove him back to the house. Even though he pulled his knees up to his chest in the passenger seat, even though the buckle pressed hard into already painful bruises, even though he was certain every passing car would hit them. Even though he didn't want to leave his brother.

Wilbur had died alone.

Tommy was with him in the car crash, but Wilbur had been alive then, albeit barely. Tommy could still hear the labored breathing. He didn't officially pass away for hours afterwards.

The car ride lasted hours and seconds at the same time. And then Phil was leading him slowly up the stairs, still carrying Tommy's cane in his hand. Tommy felt numb.

Neither of them spoke until Tommy was sitting on the couch and Phil was puttering around the kitchen, moving pans and pouring water and who-knows-what else.

"Is he going to be okay?" Tommy asked, gaze turned to the TV even though it was turned off.

"He'll be okay."

"How do you know?"

"Because Techno is strong."

And Wilbur wasn't? He didn't ask that, of course, but he thought it.

Phil walked in five minutes later with two cups of tea. He handed one to Tommy, who took a small sip before setting it on the coffee table.

"Did you put honey in this?"

A nod. "Wilbur always liked it that way. I thought you would, too."

Tommy couldn't even begin to explain the dread he felt at that statement, even if he wanted to. He picked the cup up and took another drink.

Phil's phone rang just a few minutes after that. It was the hospital, of course. It wasn't bad news, he insisted. They just needed Phil to sign a few papers.

Tommy hid a grimace. "If you need to go over there, you can."

"Are you sure you're going to be okay alone for a little while?"

No, he wanted to say. No, he would not be, because he felt like he was falling apart and he just wanted someone to comfort him. Instead, he said, "Of course I am. I'm not a baby."

"I never said- doesn't matter. I'll be back soon, I promise. If anything happens- or if you need anything- go to Schlatt's, okay?"

He nodded.

"I'll be back as soon as I can, hopefully with Techno. Stay safe, yeah?"

"You too."

And then Phil was gone.

Had Tommy ever been alone in this apartment? Maybe a few times in passing, but not really. He was always there with someone, whether it was Techno or Phil or Tubbo or Ranboo or whoever else.

It was weird.

Not a bad weird, but still. Weird.

He paused.

Maybe a bad weird.



Because suddenly he wasn't in the couch, he was in the car. Techno's or Wilbur's? He wasn't sure. But all he could see was red. Red of blood and bruises and the roses they put in Wilbur's coffin. Did they take them out before they buried him? Were they still there, rotting away with his brother?

He wondered if anyone put roses on Wilbur's grave. Niki would've, probably. So would Techno and Phil. Tommy would have, too, if he ever had the chance.

He'd never worked up the courage to ask Techno to take him to visit. When he first moved in, it was because he was too afraid to. Then, it was because he was worried he'd dampen the mood. Now it was simply because he was worried that it would remind them that he wasn't Wilbur.

He wasn't Wilbur. He wasn't.

Because Wilbur wouldn't be on his brother's couch crying because he couldn't forget about a stupid accident that happened four and a half years ago.

He needed help. He needed to breathe.

Techno would've been proud of him (so would Wilbur) for going out and knocking on Schlatt's door. He needed a distraction. He needed *help*.

There was no answer. They must not have been home.

That was fine.

No, it wasn't.

Because all he could think about was car crashes and dead siblings and his hands were shaking so badly he couldn't lock the door behind him as he went back in Techno's apartment.

Dream got out of prison a week or two ago. He had given Tommy his number ‘in case of emergency’, as well as Punz’s number and address.

He didn’t want to see Dream again. To be honest, Dream terrified him. But whatever was going on his head right now terrified him more. The phone number was hidden on a sticky note on the inside of his desk drawer (a fairly decent hiding spot, if he did say so himself). It took him a moment to get it out with the shake in his hands, but he managed, and quickly typed the number into his phone.

“I was beginning to think you weren’t going to call me.”

“Dream. I- I’m so sorry- for everything, I just... I can’t...” He was hyperventilating. He wasn’t sure if he had been doing that this entire time, but he definitely was now.

“Breathe, Tommy.” Dream’s tone was less than kind, but it sort of snapped him out of his panic. “What happened?”

“He’s dying. He’s going to die and I’m *scared*.” He hated to admit it, but he was.

“Who? Techno?”

Tommy nodded before realizing that Dream couldn’t see him. “Yeah.”

“That sucks. I guess it’s too bad you chose him, then, isn’t it?” Dream sounded so nonchalant about it, as if Tommy wasn’t going through the second worst heartbreak of his life.

“Dream, please.”

“Please what?”

There were tears forming in his eyes again. He didn’t want to be having this conversation at all. “Phil’s treating me like Wilbur and I can’t... I can’t keep doing this. They were talking about me in the hospital- they’re going to put me into foster care.”

“Then that really sucks. Again, you made your choice. I tried to keep you from this, but you never learn.”

“...Please.”

“Why should I?”

Tommy didn’t know. Tommy was a monster. He was loud and annoying and a burden. He had thought Techno had wanted him and he was so unbelievably wrong. But he had already testified against Dream. He had *betrayed* Dream, after all Dream had done for him.

Dream had been trying to save him, hadn't he? He went so far to break his ankle to try and protect him from this (wait, that can't be right) and Tommy still managed to screw everything up.

"Because I made a mistake. I made so many mistakes, and I'm so sorry... Please, Dream. I want to go home." He *was* home. Wasn't he?

"What are you sorry for?"

"For testifying against you. And running away. And going to Technoblade. And- and a thousand other things."

Dream let out a loud sigh. "You want to come home?"

"I do."

"Don't pack anything. Leave your room exactly how it is, but grab a pencil and a paper."

"I don't... I don't understand."

"You have to leave a note."

"Why?"

"Because," Dream sighed, "You have a history of running away from your guardians. Do you want them to come looking for you?"

Did he? That *would* prove they cared. No, not about him. Dream was right, they were only using him because they missed Wilbur. "No."

"Good. Now, write exactly what I say."

He wrote the entire thing before realizing what exactly he was writing.

It was a suicide note. Tommy wasn't suicidal, but this letter said he was, and he wasn't going to disobey Dream by changing the words.

Although, if he added a scribbled postscript on the back, Dream wouldn't know.

"Is anyone home right now?" Dream asked.

"No. Phil and Techno are at the hospital."

“And your... Friend? What’s his name, Tubercu-”

“Tubbo. No, I think he and his dad went out.”

“Good. You’re going to have to walk to my brother’s house. Do you still have his address?”

He did. On a sticky note next to Dream’s number. “I do.”

“I’ll see you soon, then.” With that, Dream hung up.

Tommy took a shaky breath. He was... He was really doing this. He was running away again. From Techno and Phil and everyone who loved- no. They didn’t love him. They loved Wilbur. They were starting to realize just how bad Tommy was, so they were going to send him back. That’s why Tommy had to leave.

He locked the front door before closing it. He hadn’t taken a key. It was... A symbol, he guessed. Techno talked about symbolism on several occasions. This symbolized how he was never going to go back to Techno. How he couldn’t, even if he wanted to.

Metaphorically, of course. Because there was a spare key under the mat.

It was drizzling as he walked to Punz’s house. Drizzle, not rain. Rain meant bad things, but drizzle? That was okay. Not ideal, but okay.

His ankle was throbbing by the time he made it over. Punz lived barely over a mile away, but the weather made it a dreadful walk.

Dream greeted him at the door, dressed in a t-shirt and pajama pants. He looked too comfortable for someone who just got out of prison. Tommy ignored the way Dream scowled at the cane in his hands. He ignored the way that anger melted as Dream looked at his face.

He mostly ignored those things because he was panicking. Because this was a *terrible* idea.

“I shouldn’t be here right now.” The words fell out of his mouth as soon as the door was opened. “I can’t. I can’t leave him.” Tommy insisted. “Techno...” Did he want to admit this? He shouldn’t, but he did it, anyway. “Techno’s sick.”

“Oh? Sick how?”

He didn't want to tell Dream. He shouldn't, and he knew he shouldn't. He did it anyway. "He's been having these, like, seizures. I don't know, Phil won't tell me a lot about them."

"What, so he's on the floor jerking around and stuff? That doesn't sound like someone who should take care of a kid, Tommy."

"No, no, that's not it. That only happened twice. He just sort of blanks out for a minute."

Dream quirked an eyebrow. "I've heard of those. Petit Mal seizures, yeah?"

He shrugged. "Something like that, maybe."

"It's your fault he's having them. You know that, right?" Dream said it like it was the most obvious thing in the world. He sounded so sure of himself, that Tommy nearly forgot to question it. But he did anyway.

"No it's not, what are you talking about?"

"Do you know what causes those seizures, Tommy?"

"...No."

"High blood pressure. Stress causes that. Come on, man, even *you* can tell where this is going. He didn't have them before adopting you, did he?"

It made sense.

He hated it.

But it made sense.

Because Techno was fine before he took Tommy in. And he *had* noticed that Techno had seemed more stressed lately. Tommy had tried so hard to be good, and apparently it was for *nothing*, because he still managed to screw everything up.

Oh, no.

No, no, no, no. He couldn't. He couldn't do this, he couldn't-

“Tommy,” Dream said, voice soft. It was calming. Tommy didn’t care.

This was Tommy’s fault. It was Tommy’s fault. Tommy was hurting Techno. Tommy was...

Please, no.

Tommy was killing his brother.

“Breathe, Tommy, you’re alright.”

Techno was dying and it was his fault. First Tommy had killed Wilbur (it wasn’t his fault but it was, wasn’t it? It was. If he had just been better behaved-) and now he was going to kill Techno.

He couldn’t do that.

He couldn’t lose both of his brothers. He couldn’t. He couldn’t, he couldn’t, he couldn’t, so he had to get out of there. He had to leave. He couldn’t keep doing this.

Arms wrapped around Tommy. It was surprisingly warm and comforting considering the inner turmoil Tommy was going through.

Dream had hurt him. Parents aren’t supposed to hurt their kids. Dream wasn’t supposed to hurt Tommy, but he had, over and over again. Tommy still had to use a cane. But... Tommy couldn’t stay with Techno, either. He couldn’t. He *wouldn’t*.

Besides, Techno didn’t want him, right? Techno was going to put him into foster care. The ankle wasn’t Dream’s fault, because he was just trying to protect him. That’s all he was doing. Protecting Tommy.

“Dream?” He whispered, burying his head into the man’s chest like he used to as a kid. It had been a long time since Dream had let him do that.

“Yeah, Toms?” Dream wasn’t supposed to call him Toms. Wilbur did. Wilbur was the only person allowed to do that. Tommy didn’t fight it, though. There were more important things.

He didn’t want to ask the next question, but he had no choice. Everyone else would bring him back to Techno, and Techno would send him away. Even if he wouldn’t, Techno would still *die*. Dream was the only person he could trust. “Can I stay with you again?”

“Of course, Tommy.”

## Chapter End Notes

:)

# i didn't sleep for the first week

## Chapter Notes

TW for mentions of suicide + a straight up suicide note. obviously nobody actually died, but like,, the characters don't know that

also I barely edited this, so if there are typos no there aren't

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Shortly after Phil and Tommy left, Techno came to. He was a little shaken up over everything, obviously, but he felt fine. Physically, at least, because internally he was forcing down a panic attack, and even Phil coming back wasn't calming it.

"You left him *alone*?" Techno asked incredulously. Over the past months, he had worked so hard to make sure Tommy wouldn't be alone, but apparently the second Techno stopped, Tommy was left by himself again.

"He's fine, Techno. He's safe at home, and Schlatt's right down the hall if anything were to happen."

Deep down, he knew Phil was right. Still... "I appreciate you bringing him home,, I really do. But couldn't you have stayed with him?"

"No, they needed me here. Paperwork and legal stuff."

"I'm an adult, I can do my own paperwork."

"You are. But if you're having unexplainable seizures, then someone still has to watch over you."

Somewhere along the way, Techno had gotten it in his head that it was just him and Tommy against the world. He knew it wasn't true, that so many other people were involved in helping them, but... It felt overbearing, to have his dad here for this.

Was this how Wilbur felt? As they grew older, Techno had tried to offer help, but he was always turned away. Maybe pride ran in the family.



"Did they say when I'd be released?"

"In the morning, hopefully."

"Isn't it already morning?"

"One-thirty isn't morning, Techno."

"One-thirty *A.M.*"

"That's not... Sure, kid. But it won't be until later, maybe eleven."

"That isn't morning."

"Go to sleep, Tech."

He groaned, rolling over in the hospital bed so his back was facing Phil. He stared ahead at the wall, thinking for a moment.

"You really shouldn't have left him alone. It's kind of been a thing to *not* leave him."

"He'll be alright. He's a teenager, not a child. And he knows he can go to Schlatt or call me or anyone else if he needs help."

That's the thing. Techno wasn't actually sure that was true. "He was just so freaked out earlier."

"During your seizure? Trust me, mate, I was, too."

"No. Well, yeah, but before that, too, when we were talking. He... Said some things about Wilbur's accident."

"Oh...?"

"He just- he said something. I didn't realize earlier, but, Phil..." He sat up, turned to face his father. "Was Tommy in that car when it happened?"

"Techno..."

"I've seen how nervous he gets when we drive in the rain. I always brushed it off, but then... He completely zoned out after the accident, like he called nine-one-one and then mentally checked out.

"I didn't..."

"He mentioned it, when we were talking. Said that tonight's- er, yesterday's- crash reminded him of that. When I agreed with him, he told me I didn't understand."

“Listen...”

“Dad, tell me.”

Phil was quiet for a long moment. “Tommy was in the back seat of the car during the crash.”

He wanted to deny it. To tell Phil he was lying, that there was no way. But... It made sense. It made heaps of sense, actually.

It explained who called nine-one-one after the accident. It explained why they knew what vehicle hit Wilbur, even though there wasn't a video. It explained why Tommy would sometimes squeeze his eyes closed as they passed through intersections.

"But Tommy wasn't hurt."

"Car accidents are like that, mate. He got out with a few scratches and bruises."

“Why didn't you tell me?” He would've asked it more angrily, but Phil looked almost ashamed.

“You and Wilbur are twins, and back then, you and Tommy didn't particularly get along. I didn't want you to blame him for what happened.”

“But...”

“I know, but I was panicked. I had just lost my son, I was dealing with two grieving kids. I made a bad decision. And... Then I just never found the time to tell you.”

Phil didn't want him to blame Tommy. But why would he blame him? Even if they didn't get along, Techno wouldn't have unless he had a solid reason to.

“So it was his fault?” He clapped a hand over his mouth as soon as he said it. Because he *knew* that it wasn't true. No matter the cause of the accident, it wasn't Tommy's fault.

Phil took a sharp breath in at that. “I don't know.”

“You... You don't know?”

“I don't know. Tommy's the only one who knows everything that happened, but I wouldn't be surprised if he blocked most of it out.”

Techno nodded slightly. What else was he supposed to do?

"I shouldn't have kept it from you. I'm sorry."

"It's fine, Phil."

That was a lie. That was a lie, because Techno was... Angry. Upset. Confused. He wasn't regretting his decision to adopt Tommy, but... Would he have made the same choice if he knew this already?

It could have been Tommy's fault. Wilbur's death could've been caused by Tommy. His brother would have still been here if-

His brother *was* here. His brother was at the apartment, alone, probably freaking out.

It was much too late to think about the past. Not when he had bigger issues. Right now, those 'bigger issues' were dealing with the seizures, and Tommy.

"How long until they release me, again?"

He ended up being released at ten in the morning. They'd have to wait days for test results, so there was no real reason to keep him at the hospital. After being briefed on what to do if another seizure occurred, Phil and Techno went home.

The apartment was quiet. Almost too quiet, without Tommy and his friends running around causing chaos, or Tubbo's cat begging for food despite the fact that Techno had never fed that thing.

Speaking of Tubbo, they barely had time to settle in before there was that quiet tapping at the door.

Phil answered the door, claiming that Techno needed to rest.

"Is Tommy here?" Oh, that wasn't Tubbo, that was Ranboo.

"He's in his room, but he might be sleeping." Phil shrugged. "You can try to wake him if you want, but he had a rough night last night."

"That's okay, we can cheer him up. Right, Ranboo?" Tubbo asked. After Ranboo gave a quiet noise of affirmation, the boys rushed inside and to Tommy's room, not even bothering to

knock.

It was quiet for maybe thirty seconds, before Tubbo awkwardly cleared his throat

“Uh, Technoblade?” Tubbo asked. He sounded... Confused?

“Yeah?”

“I thought you said Tommy was here?”

“He is?” Techno glanced over, where Tubbo was standing in the doorway.

“He’s not in his room...”

Before Techno could reply, Ranboo spoke up, pushing his way past Tubbo. “I’m sorry, Technoblade? I think you need to see this?” He was gripping a piece of paper in his hand. Ranboo brought it to Techno before he had the chance to even stand up.

Carefully, he took the letter and began reading.

*'Techno and Phil,*

*By the time you find this letter, it will be too late. I'm sorry.*

*Please don't think any of this is your fault. It isn't. I've struggled with these thoughts for years now, and they've become too much to bear.*

*I'm going to'* the rest of the line was smudged, crossed out, and completely forgotten about by the next paragraph.

*'Techno, I'm giving you Will's guitar. Please take care of it. Also the nerf gun.*

*Phil, you get my CD's. One of them has Will's unfinished songs on them. If you break them I'll*

*I'm s*

*You can do what you want with the rest of my things. I don't really care.*

*I'll tell Will and mom that you say hi*

*-Tommy'*

No. No no no there was no way.

He flipped the paper over, surprised to actually find more writing there. It was scribbled, much messier than the front page. Almost like it was written in a hurry (but why would Tommy have to rush?)

*'Techno I'm sorry I didn't know what else to do. I wish I could've been the brother you wanted, but I can't. I can't be Wilbur. I'll miss you, don't die'*

Techno hadn't realized the kids were reading over his shoulder until Tubbo let out a gasp.

"It's okay, I'm... I'm sure he's okay. Maybe he just ran away for some reason." Ranboo whispered to Tubbo, who in turn, shook his head.

"He would've told me... Last time he ran away, he told me first. We made a whole plan."

What was Tommy talking about? Struggled with what thoughts? And, can't be Wilbur? No one had said he *had* to be. It didn't make sense.

Techno's hands were shaking. Phil took the note from his hands before reading it himself. The kids were talking, but he couldn't listen.

"I think you two need to head home now." Phil said in barely a whisper. Techno was vaguely aware of them leaving, of Phil putting a hand on his back and leading him to sit on the couch (something about in case he has another seizure), of Phil making a report for the missing child.

"We left him alone." Techno muttered. *"I left him alone. And now he's gone. I can't... Phil, he can't have- I don't-*

"It's okay, Tech. It's okay." The hand rubbed circles into his back, but it wasn't comforting.

Police were there within the hour, asking questions and searching the house. Techno answered the best he could, but he could barely think straight.

After reading the letter, the cops seemed a lot more hesitant to help.

"All signs point to a suicide." He heard one of them tell Phil. "We'll search the rivers and bridges, but there's nothing much more we can do."

"Do you really think he..." Phil trailed off.

"You confirmed that the note's in his own handwriting, sir. I know it can be hard to understand when tragedies like this happen, and we'll never really know his thought process."

It didn't make sense. Not Tommy, not his little brother, not the *child*. Tommy wouldn't have done this, Techno was sure. There was no way that his Theseus would've... Would've... Would have done that. Which led to the question- what really happened?

Once the police had left, Techno practically ransacked the room searching for a sign of where Tommy went. A sign that he was still alive.

But everything was exactly like it had been before Tommy disappeared.

Clothes still in the hamper, bee still on his dresser, photo of Tommy and Wilbur on the desk, nerf gun on his... Wait.

The frame had been knocked over, probably by Tubbo or Ranboo, and lay face down. Techno picked it up to look at the picture.

There was no picture. The frame was empty.

"Phil! He brought his photo of Wilbur. He wouldn't have taken it if he was going to... To..."

Phil shook his head. There were tears in his eyes, and he already looked exhausted. "Techno, that doesn't mean anything."

"It does! Why would he take it if he was going to-"

“Because he wanted to see Wilbur one last time before he did it? The photo doesn’t matter, Techno.”

“It does!”

“Techno.”

“He’s not dead, Phil! He’s not- he... He can’t be dead.” There were tears in his own eyes. Down his cheeks. Dripping onto his shirt. He couldn’t do this. He couldn’t lose another brother.

“Techno, come here.” Phil pulled him into a side-hug and led him to the couch once again. He didn’t fight him, just went along. They ended up in a half-sitting half-lying position, Techno leaning heavily onto Phil, who ran his fingers through Techno’s tangled hair.

“Do you remember when Wilbur first died?” Phil’s voice was soft now.

Techno made a vague noise as an answer. He didn’t want to talk.

“I didn’t sleep for the first week. I hardly even left the couch, so sure that Wilbur would walk through the front door at any moment, completely fine.”

He took in a sharp breath as Phil continued.

“I didn’t want to believe he was dead. I *didn’t* believe he was dead. And I... I’d even seen the body, you know...”

Techno curled in on himself a little. He wasn’t sure where this conversation was going. Wasn’t sure he wanted to know.

“I know it’s hard to lose someone-”

“Stop it. Phil, please, just stop.”

"You'll be okay."

"I don't *care*."

They were quiet for a long moment. "I'm here for you, I promise."

Techno sighed. "What if Dream took him?"

"Dream's in prison. He'll be there for a long time. He couldn't have gotten to him, even if he wanted to. I know it's hard to understand. But you said the note is in Tommy's own handwriting, right?"

"It is."

"Then he wrote it. We don't know *why*, but he wrote it. All we can do is hope that the police find him." Find *him*, or find his body?

They fell into silence. Phil was still running his fingers through Techno's hair. At some point he started to braid it in small plaits.

"I didn't mean to come off so harshly Technoblade." Phil whispered. "I shouldn't have, anyway. I know what I said, but... Tommy might still be alive."

Techno took a sharp breath. "You really think-"

"I don't know. But just because he wrote a letter doesn't mean he succeeded in... You know..." that was the problem with their family, wasn't it? No matter the tragedy, they just couldn't say the words.

"He could be alive."

"He could."

"We need to look for him."

"We can't."

Techno pulled away, narrowly missing getting his hair yanked, Phil's fingers still tangled in it. "Why not?"

"You're having seizures, Technoblade. You can't *drive*, and even if you could, we have no idea where he went."

"Then *you* drive. We can't just stay here-"

"You need to calm down."

"I can't stay calm, Phil. He's probably out there somewhere, terrified-"

"Techno." Phil snapped. He was using his reprimanding-father's voice now, the kind he would use before grounding Techno as a kid. "You're going to have another seizure if you don't stop and take a deep breath. Look, the police are already searching for him."

He forced himself to take a breath. "They won't know where to look."

"And you do?"

He sighed. Phil was right, and Techno hated that he was right. Because, more than anything else, he hated not being able to do anything.



“It’ll be okay. Everything worked out last time he went missing, everything will work out again. The kid’s tough as nails, he’ll survive. He’ll be okay.”

He had to force himself to believe him. Even if Phil was wrong- because he most likely was- he *had* to believe it. It was his only source of hope.

At some point, Phil left to go get takeout for dinner. They should’ve just ordered in, but delivery prices had gone up too much, and it wasn’t that far of a drive. Phil was apprehensive, but after Techno pointed out that the man had no qualms leaving *Tommy* alone, he left.

Techno used that as his chance to look through Tommy’s things again. It wasn’t an invasion of privacy if he was dead, Techno thought, sarcastically. Of course, Tommy wasn’t dead. He couldn’t be.

He might be.

His heart sunk at the eventual discovery of Tommy’s phone. Tommy took the thing *everywhere* with him. It was one of his most prized possessions, and Techno couldn’t blame him for being so protective of it.

Tommy would not have left it at home.

Despite being a gremlin, despite saying things out of nowhere, despite a thousand things about Tommy, some things were still predictable. Namely, his phone password.

It happened to be the last four digits of Wilbur’s old phone number, though Techno elected to ignore that fact.

It wasn’t an invasion of privacy if it meant finding his brother.

Skimming through texts did nothing good. Neither did looking at Discord, Instagram, and a few other apps. There was no useful information, unless you counted memes, which Techno didn’t.

Eventually, he found himself opening up the phone app. Did teens even make phone calls these days? Tommy certainly did. And...

The most recent call was from last night. Er, this morning. At six A.M. That had to have only been a few hours before Tommy had written the note, if that.

Without thinking, he pressed redial.

And it went straight to voicemail. No good.

He scrolled through the recent calls list. Tubbo and Ranboo were both there a lot, but Techno knew neither of them knew nothing about what had happened.

But, Aaron, maybe.

Tommy had been talking to Aaron an awful lot. Like, a *weird* amount. And he was so secretive about the calls, too. Techno had tried to give him privacy about it, especially because it seemed like Tommy didn't like talking about those phone calls, but, still. If it helped find Tommy. He pressed redial.

To his surprise, it was not a teenage boy who picked up the phone.

Well, technically, no one picked up the phone.

It was a deep male voice, pre-recorded, and the audio quality was so bad that it was hard to make out what was being said.

"You have reached the Wyoming State Penitentiary. If you are trying to contact an inmate, they are not allowed to receive incoming calls. You can contact them directly through letter, or wait until they make an outgoing call to you. If you are trying to call the prison, you can reach us at-" They read off a number, but Techno wasn't listening.

Wyoming State Penitentiary was where Dream was. *Why* did Tommy have the prison's number in his recent call list? Why was it under Aaron's name?

Oh, no...

Had Dream been calling Tommy?

It would make sense why Tommy hadn't been getting better emotionally, if Dream was still calling. But... Techno would've known. Right? How would he have been so stupid, so careless, to miss something as big as this?

He brought it up to Phil as soon as he got back.

"I didn't know he was calling him. That's awful." Phil murmured.

"I just don't understand. How would Dream even have his number?"

Phil just shrugged. "Maybe Tommy gave it to him at the prison?"

Techno froze. Slowly, he turned to look Phil in the eyes. "He gave it to him *where*?"

Phil frowned, furrowing his brows slightly. "The... Prison. When he visited Dream, a few months ago. He said he told you."

"No, he didn't tell me. What are you talking about?"

"He... A few months ago, he called me and begged me to take him to the prison. Said he was scared and wouldn't be able to calm down because he couldn't really believe Dream was locked up."

"And... You took him? Without my permission?"

"He said he had your permission! You signed paperwork and everything."

"I never signed paperwork, Phil."

"Oh you've got to be joking." Phil dropped his head in his hands. "I should've known. I should've- I can't- I'm sorry."

"You took him to the prison. Without my permission." Techno repeated, incredulously.

Apparently Tommy had insisted everything would be fine. Apparently Phil thought it would be good for him to gain closure on the whole situation.

Apparently, neither of those things were true.

The police found Tommy's shoes next to a river the next day. They said that they were placed next to the edge.

They didn't find a body.

That didn't mean anything.

Tommy couldn't be dead. Not Tommy, not Techno and Wilbur's little brother. Not the loud, energetic kid that Techno adopted mere months ago.

They found his shoes. He left a note.

Techno had another seizure. He was lucky that Phil had been there, honestly, because Phil had helped him lay down and taken off his glasses and made sure he didn't hurt himself. Because Phil let his doctors know about this seizure. Because Phil had been dealing with pretty much the entire medical situation, as if Techno was a child again.

Because Techno *couldn't* deal with it.

He had lost his mother.

He had lost his twin.

And now he had lost his little brother.

It was too much.

He clung to Phil that next day, terrified of losing him, too. Sure, Phil was perfectly healthy, but *Techno* was perfectly healthy, and now here he was having seizures all the time.

Techno was tired. Too tired to grieve, too tired to work, he was just tired.

Two days after Tommy's shoes were found, he was officially declared dead. Phil had started planning a funeral, which Techno strictly refused to help with.

Although he had been the one to suggest he be 'buried' next to Wilbur. It seemed only fitting.

He didn't want to think about it anymore. So maybe that was why, when his phone lit up from an unknown caller, he answered. Because, maybe, it would be a scam caller and he could mess with them. Maybe it would be Niki, offering to bring over cake. Maybe it would be someone telling him that he wasn't epileptic, that his brothers were alive and fine, and that these last five years had all been a bad dream.

The call had turned out to be none of those things.

## Chapter End Notes

I'm not gonna lie, I don't like this chapter at all. It accomplishes what it needs to, but,,, eh. I swear the next techno pov chapter will be leaps and bounds better.

I remember That's Like a Hundred Miles getting 100 comments on the last chapter and feeling so psyched, and then y'all just casually give last chapter well over 100? terrifying. thank you.

I have a good portion of the next chapters already planned + written, but I am majorly second-guessing myself, so who knows when they'll actually come out lol

Finally, I have the ending planned. I'm planning on writing a chapter set like a year(ish) after the ending, and I swear it'll be 100% (ok maybe not 100% but majority is I swear) fluff, and I'm wondering if you would prefer it as a one-shot or as an epilogue chapter? Either way, that'll probably be the very end of this series, since I don't have any other ideas.

Anyway, super long chapter note, but have a great day, stay safe.

# **you could've been great, you know**

## Chapter Notes

READ THIS - - -

TW for child abuse, manipulation, and, most importantly, dream straight up tries to murder a child. If you need to skip that part, stop reading at "He was so screwed.", and you can pick it up again at "No, stop it. He wasn't going to die. He'd gone too far to give up now."

apologies in advance for how dark this chapter is

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Shortly after Tommy entered the house, he met Punz.

Punz was barely taller than Tommy, with hair so blonde that it had to be bleached. He looked athletic, and not that Tommy was sizing him up, but he could most definitely take Tommy in a fight. Not that they'd have any reason to, but just in case.

He was pretty sure Punz was around Techno's age, maybe a little younger. Dream was older than Techno by almost two years, though he wasn't sure of the age difference between him and Punz.

"Right, so." Dream said, clapping his hands together. Tommy barely held back a flinch. There was no need to flinch, he reminded himself. He was safe. He was home. "Tommy, this is my brother, Punz. Punz, this is my ward, Tommy."

Punz smiled, and though Tommy looked for anger in his eyes, he didn't find any. "Hi, Tommy. It's nice to meet you."

Tommy gave him a small wave in return, unsure of what to do.

"Dream's told me a lot about you. You sound like a good kid." Punz continued.

Had Dream really referred to him as a 'good kid'? That was surprising, but not unwanted.

After a moment, Dream leaned forward and whispered to Punz. It had the appearance of being a secret, but he was talking too loudly for that to be true.

"Tommy was put in foster care six months ago when I was wrongfully imprisoned." He said to Punz, "He called me a few nights ago, telling me how... Abusive they were. The kid is terrified of cops, and I didn't know how to get in contact with the foster system, so I thought I'd invite him over here. I hope you don't mind, it'll only be temporary until we figure something else out."

"Of course I don't mind. Please, Tommy, make yourself at home."

Within the first two hours of staying at Punz's house, Dream had taken Tommy's shoes, cane, and earbuds. It wasn't like he could even *use* the earbuds, since he left his phone at home, but he knew better than to argue or complain about it. He knew he didn't deserve those things, anyway.

He didn't, right? Techno said he deserved them. Said they were 'basic necessities', but...

Whatever. He didn't want to think about Techno. He was with *Dream*. He was *home*.

He *was* home, right? Granted, it wasn't Dream's house, but Dream was there, so that was close enough, really.

It would've been more comforting had Dream not been so angry.

The thing about him was, when around other people, he never was outwardly angry. He'd smile, he'd joke, and he'd just be a normal person. But Tommy could see the anger in his movements, in the way he gripped things just a little too tightly, or looked at Tommy just a little too long.

Dream had every right to be angry. Dream had every right to punish him, too, and Tommy knew that.

But Tommy was scared. It was cowardly, he knew that, but he didn't want to find out what would happen. And he knew that Dream wouldn't punish him in front of other people, so...

He ended up spending a lot of time with Punz.

“What kind of name is Punz, anyway?”

“It’s... My name?”

Punz was cooking something, though Tommy hadn’t bothered to check what. Currently, he was stirring something in a frying pan while Tommy sat at the breakfast bar, watching him.

“It’s not a very good one. What kind of person has ‘Z’ in their name?”

“I do. What kind of person has ‘Y’ in their name?”

"Tommy isn't even my legal name, prick."

"Yeah, sure it isn't."

"It isn't!"

"What is it, then?"

"Thomas. Which doesn't have a 'Y' in it."

Punz rolled his eyes. "Thomas doesn't suit you."

"My brother used to say that."

"You have a brother?"

Did this guy seriously not know?

"Yeah. Two of 'em." He paused, then added, "Kind of..."

"Why didn't Dream adopt them, too?"

"I, uh... They're both way older than me. And one of them's dead, so..."

"Oh... Sorry."



He shrugged. "It's fine."

"What about the other one, then?"

At the mention of his older brother, he took in a sharp breath. "Techno- he... He doesn't like me very much. I dunno."

Punz nodded at that slightly. "Yeah, I get that. Dream and I don't get along great, either."

Tommy paused at that. Dream and Punz seemed perfectly civil in the few hours he'd been there. Plus, Dream was apparently living with him for the time being? Why wouldn't they get along?

"To be fair, if your first contact with your brother in years was him asking to stay over at your house because he was getting out of prison- and you didn't know he was there in the first place- you wouldn't be too happy, either." It was probably supposed to be a joke, judging by the way Punz chuckled after he said it, but Tommy didn't think it was that funny.

Techno had mentioned that he could go to jail for kidnapping if he didn't give Tommy back to Dream. Dream had even said that he could get twenty-something years for it.

Were the roles reversed, now that Dream wasn't his legal guardian? Would he get in trouble for kidnapping? Then again, if he got out of jail after everything he did to Tommy...

No, stop that, because Dream didn't do anything *wrong*. He was just trying to protect Tommy. It was all for his own good. To teach him or something. It hurt, yeah, but that's just how it was.

It wasn't like that with Techno. Techno was kinder in his reprimands. His punishments were light, and they never left him with bruises.

"Yeah, I guess."

"He still won't tell me what he got arrested for, you know." He muttered, shaking his head. He glanced back at Tommy. "You don't happen to know, do you? His records aren't public, so..."

Child neglect. Child endangerment. Child *abuse*.

Phil had cried when he found out. Even the judge had looked disturbed.

What Dream did was... Wrong? Bad? Illegal, apparently. But not undeserved. Maybe... maybe undeserved.

The funny thing was, Tommy couldn't remember the pain in his ankle as clearly as he used to. Yeah, it still hurt all the time, but it had been months since it originally broke. He remembered *being* in pain, but looking back, maybe he had just been dramatic (though something in the back of his mind told him he wasn't).

From the original lie Dream told, Tommy could tell that Punz wasn't supposed to know about the whole prison thing. He'd like to think that Dream would be proud that Tommy lied for him, but he couldn't say for certain.

"Sorry man, I don't know."

"Figures."

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"You're acting like a child, Tommy." Dream was standing outside of Tommy's room (or, Punz's gaming room, with an air mattress set on the floor). His arms were folded as he looked down at Tommy.

"I'm not- I'm not a child!"

"You're *acting* like one. You never listen, do you?"

"I just want my cane-"

"Do you really think you deserve it?"

It was jarring, to go from Techno constantly telling him to use his cane, to Dream, who refused to let him so much as look at it.

"I don't..." He wasn't answering the question, he just wasn't sure how to finish his sentence.  
"I don't understand the question."

“Have you done something to warrant a gift like this cane?”

Tommy wasn't sure where he went wrong. He had been there barely a day (two days? Less? He wasn't keeping track) before everything went downhill.

He hadn't even *done* anything.

No, no, he had done something. Something wrong, apparently.

“Well, Techno says-” Tommy had begun to say. Dream sat in the chair across from him, when suddenly he slammed his hands down on the arm rests. “Will you *shut up* about Technoblade?”

Tommy immediately shrunk back. He had been *so* good about not flinching as of late, but this set him off, apparently. “I'm sorry, I didn't-”

“Sorry doesn't cut it, Tommy. You know how I feel about that man, yet you continue to bring him up.”

Don't bring up Technoblade.

He hadn't realized it was a rule.

A new rule, nonetheless, but he still should have known about it already. Should've figured it out by context clues or something. Surely they were there, if he actually had been paying attention, which he hadn't.

“I didn't mean to. I'm sorry.” He tried, again.

“No, you're not. I just can't believe that after everything I've done for you, everything I *gave* you, you're still ungrateful about it.”

“I'm not ungrateful! I just- I...” He frowned, realizing his feelings as he spoke them. “I just miss Techno.” Wasn't that funny? He missed Dream so desperately in these last six months, but as soon as he went back to him, he started missing Techno.

He received a slap across his face. Good thing Punz wasn't around to see it, he guessed.

“Dream-”

Whatever anger had flashed across Dream’s face vanished again, just for a moment. “Look, Tommy, I’m not keeping you here. If you want to go back to Techno, that’s fine by me.”

That was surprising. He didn’t think... It would be hard, without shoes and a cane, but he could go back... Did he even want to go back? He wasn’t sure.

“As long as you’re fine with killing another brother.”

Oh. Right.

The black-outs. The seizures. The car crash. All of which had been Tommy’s fault. If he had just been a little better, it could’ve all been avoided. Techno would’ve been fine... Maybe he would be fine, now that Tommy was gone. He could heal, or calm down, or whatever.

“No.” Tommy said, quickly. “No, no, I don’t want- I don’t want to hurt him. I’m sorry.”

“Then stop bringing him up. Stop talking about him.”

“I’m sorry, D-”

“I swear, you were there for a few months and you’ve already managed to unlearn everything I taught you.”

“I didn’t- Dream, I swear I didn’t unlearn anything.”

“Really, Tommy? Let’s see: you ran away twice,” He started counting on his fingers as he listed, “You talk constantly about your brothers- both of them- you went against my orders, you got food without asking. You’ve broken nearly every rule I’ve set for you in the first five hours you were here, Tommy. Tell me, does that sound like something a good child would do? Something a good *person* would do?”

“I’m sorry.” He tried, again.

Dream grabbed his chin, forcing his head up to look at him. “That’s not an answer to my question.”

“I... No, that’s not something a good person would do.”

“Exactly. And you want to be good, don’t you?”

“I do.”

Dream's eyes were green with flecks of grey. Tommy knew this, because he was still looking right at them, despite the fact that he wanted to look anywhere else. Looking into his eyes, he could see the anger.

Dream was so, so angry.

He hadn't been that angry when Tommy used to bring up Wilbur. He'd learned to stop, early on, but at least for the first bit Dream was never angry. Just chiding, telling him that he needed to move on and get over it.

Now, Dream looked... He looked pissed. He looked like, for whatever reason, *that* was the thing that sent him over the edge.

Dream let go of his chin, and Tommy immediately took a few steps back.

"I should've done this when you first came here." Dream muttered to himself, walking out of the room. Tommy stood alone, awkwardly, unsure if he was supposed to follow or not. "Well? Are you coming?" Dream called from somewhere near the kitchen. Quickly he followed.

Punz was sitting in the living room, a show playing quietly on the TV. He glanced back at them, and Tommy caught the frown on his face. "Everything okay in there?"

"Yeah, we're fine. Tommy and I are just going out for a bit." Dream said. He swiped something off of the kitchen counter before heading to the door.

Tommy followed without complaint. Dream was angry, and he knew better than to question what was going on.

Punz, however, didn't seem to catch that. "Shouldn't Tommy have a jacket?"

"No, he won't be outside too long."

A nod, then he frowned. "He isn't even wearing shoes."

"Again, won't be out too long."

"I don't think--"

“Bye, Punz.” Dream rolled his eyes and walked out the door. Tommy followed, quickly flashing an apologetic look to Punz.

In turn, Punz looked... Confused. Worried. In the way Technoblade used to- no, no, don't think about that. He was home. He was with Dream. He was safe here.

As soon as he stepped outside, his socks were wet. Gross. He didn't dare complain, because Dream was still angry. He was led to the car. Dream mumbled “get in” to him, before climbing in the driver's seat.

Tommy crossed to the other side of the car, opening the door before-

“Tommy! What do you think you're doing?”

“Oh- sorry.” He closed the passenger door, climbing in the back one instead.

“Again, forgetting everything I've taught you.” Dream murmured, more to himself, though there was still a reprimanding tone about it. Without waiting for Tommy to put on a seatbelt, he pulled out of the driveway and started going... Somewhere.

His socks were still wet, and his feet were freezing inside of them. Drops of water splattered against the windows, and Tommy squeezed his eyes shut to avoid watching it.

Tommy used to love the rain. It reminded him of playing in puddles with the neighbor kids. Of coming inside with rubber boots dripping with water.

He didn't love it anymore. Now all it made him think of was intersections and shattered glass and funerals.

By the time he opened his eyes again, it was dark. Not that it wasn't dark before- the cloudy skies had covered the sky and coated the entire area in a dark grey, but now it was truly dark, as if the sun had been fully blotted out. Was it nighttime already?

Oh. Not night time.

Trees stretched high above the road Techno drove on. There were no streetlights- the only light given by the headlights of the car. Tommy shuddered, suddenly very, very cold.

What he was having wasn't a panic attack. But it was still a sudden, almost overwhelming fear deep within his chest.

This was wrong. This was bad. He shouldn't have gone with Dream. He should never have left Techno-

But he was killing Techno. Techno was *dying*. Because of *him*.

It was Tommy's fault that their mother died. Had he never been born, she would still be here. Their family would be complete, happy. But it was much too late for that, and Tommy didn't really get a say in whether he was born or not.

However, when he was ten and acting out in class, he had a choice. He could've worked harder on homework, he could've tried to focus and sit still more in class. But no, he ended up getting in trouble. He ended up needing a talk with his teacher, with Wilbur there. It was his fault they were in the car in the first place. It was his fault that Wilbur had been so angry. If he hadn't distracted Wilbur, then he still would have-

Whatever. He wasn't going to let Techno die. That was out of the picture. Not even an option. So he *had* to be with Dream, because he *couldn't* be with Techno.

Dream pulled the car over. They were... In the middle of the forest. No other cars, no buildings, nothing near them. It was dark, and Tommy could hear the quiet chirping of bugs in the downpour of rain.

"Get out." Dream practically growled out the words. Why was he so angry? He grabbed something off of the passenger seat- the same thing he pulled from the kitchen. It glinted slightly, light reflecting off from who-knows-where, and...

Was that a knife?

Shakily, he got out of the car. Wet socks now squishing in the mud. He cringed at the feeling, but refused to outwardly show it. He had to stay strong. Whatever was happening, he'd be fine. He would be okay. Dream was his friend. Dream would never hurt him. The only reason Dream had broken his ankle was to protect him.

Dream would *not* hurt him.

That was a lie.

The realization (or acceptance of it) hurt, but that's what it was. It was one of those things one told themselves over and over, until they eventually believed it. Like if they repeated it enough, it would become true.

It wasn't true.

He was so stupid.

Tubbo wouldn't have fallen for this.

Techno wouldn't have fallen for this.

Wilbur wouldn't have ever gotten into this situation in the first place.

He had been so sure of it, even back when he first bought that burner phone, that Dream was going to kill him. But he had pushed that thought away because he wanted to be comforted. And now...

Dream *was going* to kill him. No question.

Dream had a knife. Dream was leading him further into the forest. Dream had made him write a suicide note a day ago, of *course* Dream was going to kill him. How hadn't he realized? Maybe he had, and he just hadn't cared.

His limp was worse now than it ever had been. Every time he put weight on that foot he resisted the urge to cry out. He wished he had his cane. Or his shoes. Or... Or Techno.

That wasn't fair to Techno. That wasn't fair to himself, either.

Techno only wanted him because he wanted Wilbur.



...Right?

What if- what if Dream was wrong?

Wilbur didn't use a cane. Why would Techno give him a cane. If he wanted to make him like Wilbur, why wouldn't he give him a beanie or something instead? It was a weak thought, but still.

Dream stopped, suddenly, and Tommy barely stopped himself from falling over due to stopping so quickly.

How deep in the forest were they? Far enough that he couldn't see the car anymore.

He knew what was going on. He was going to die here. He was alone in the forest with Dream. Dream, his friend, his guardian- his abuser. He had *hurt* him. Over, and over, and over, and Tommy had allowed him to. Tommy was *still* allowing him to by following him.

He needed to get out of here. He needed to escape and go- where? There was nowhere to go.

He'd find somewhere. Someone. It didn't matter, anyway, the first step was to get away from Dream. Dream was still holding the knife in his hand, and stood only a few feet away from Tommy. Tommy, who was standing in soaking wet socks, who could barely see through the heavy rain and the shadows cast by the trees.

Tommy vaguely remembered movies where the hero kept the villain talking, getting time for their allies to arrive.

Tommy had no allies. No friends, no family, no one. No one was coming to save him. Still, he could stall while he found a way out.

"Why are you doing this, Dream?"

Dream had the audacity to laugh. To run a hand through already soaking wet hair while he had that unsettling look in his eyes. "I just wanted a family, you know."

"That's why you adopted me?"

"Of course. You were alone, your own family didn't want you. I could take care of you better than they ever could." Dream took a step towards him.

Tommy, in turn, took a step back. "But you hurt me." Pointing out Dream's shortcomings was usually a bad idea, but he was running low on ideas.

"Only to teach you. To make you *better*. You were so broken, you know, when I first took you in. Only now, I've learned. Thomas Watson is unfixable." Another step forward.

Another step back. "What made me broken? Because I was like Wilbur?"

"You're both so stubborn. At least he had the nerve to die on his own."

Tommy flinched backwards, surprised to feel the rough bark of a tree against his back. Oh, great. He was cornered.

"You should've died with him, Tommy."

"Are... Are you really going to kill me?"

Dream laughed. A painful, wheezing laugh, but a laugh nonetheless. "Yes, Tommy. Why else would I make you write the note? You're so stupid sometimes."

"I thought-" He cut himself off. It didn't matter. What mattered was that Dream was moving closer and Tommy couldn't move away. "Why?"

"You took *everything* from me." Dream growled. "My home, my friends, my job. You sent me to prison for *months*."

"I'm sorry-"

"Sorry doesn't cut it!" Dream swung his fist forward in a punch, but Tommy was too fast.

He ducked, cringing at the sound of skin hitting tree, before immediately booking it further into the forest.

It wasn't like he knew where he was going. He didn't get very far.

His ankle gave out halfway through a step, and then a hand was yanking him backwards by his foot.

He was so screwed.

An already-bloody fist collided with his face, right across his cheek. He couldn't react before another hit his nose with a crack.

Dream grabbed him by the shoulders and pulled him to his feet only to immediately pin him against another tree.

Tommy screamed. He struggled.

For the first time in his life, he fought back.

Self defense classes were helpful. It meant he knew how to go against an attacker. He managed to grab Dream's wrist, holding it in a way that effectively stopped the punches.

And then he saw the glint of metal in Dream's other hand.

It felt like his stomach was on fire. It was sharp and hot and he could feel the warmth of blood already dripping.

No, no, there's no way that just happened...

Tommy fell to his knees as Dream shook his head.

"If I knew this was all it took to shut you up, I would've done this years ago."

Dream crouched down next to him. And then there was more of that fire-y pain, this one blooming somewhere between his torso and his shoulder.

Tommy screamed.

It was too much to even think about fighting back. All he could do was scream and pray someone would hear him.

More pain. Something deep and just *wrong* in his chest. He could feel the short blade being twisted as Dream pulled the kitchen knife out.

It hurt. It was overwhelming, and Tommy couldn't *see* much less *scream*.

"You could've been great, you know." Dream muttered. "You had so much potential. A shame it was all wasted."

The knife was brought against his neck, and that had to be the worst Tommy had felt in his entire life.

This was it.

This was how he died.

Thomas Theseus Watson, murder victim at age fifteen because he thought it'd be smart to go back to his abuser.

It was a common move in horror movies, to slash a victim's neck. He closed his eyes in anticipation.

But then Dream paused. When Tommy opened his eyes, he could see the deep frown etched across Dream's face as he looked behind him, back at... Something.

"You know what?" Dream whispered. Or, maybe he was just talking, because everything sounded so far away right now. "I think bleeding out is more fitting for you. That way you can die like your brother." Tommy couldn't even argue as Dream stood up and... something. He didn't know, couldn't see.

Whatever happened, Dream was gone. Dream left him, alone, to bleed out in the middle of a forest.

He was hoping that the pain would fade to aching. He could work with that. But instead, it was as sharp as it had been originally. It was the worst in his chest, which he guessed made sense. But this pain made his broken ankle feel like a scraped knee. He could barely force himself to breathe.

Tommy was strong. He could do this. He just... He had to sit up first. To find his cane. Then he could go.

But he was so tired...

The rain had let up a little, meaning that it wasn't exactly washing the blood away. It didn't help that he was partially under the cover of a tree.

The blood had cooled faster than he thought, and now it was freezing against his skin. Tommy was so, so cold.

Was this what death felt like? Tired, painful cold, and then you pass away?

No, stop it. He wasn't going to die. He'd gone too far to give up now.

He was exhausted. He couldn't get up if he wanted to.

Maybe... He could rest. Just for five minutes. Then he'd go.

Yeah.

That felt like a good plan.

A traitorous voice in the back of his head that sounded suspiciously like Techno said it wasn't a good plan at all, that if he didn't get up now, he never would. He ignored that voice.

Five minutes.

Then he... then he'd go.

For now, he would rest.

He felt his eyes slip closed.

## Chapter End Notes

rip to everyone who thought this would be a fluffy recovery fic. it was going to be at one point, but then my brain went "what if not tho"

# eyes open, theseus

## Chapter Notes

TW for graphic descriptions of blood and injury,,, y'know, like the warning that's been on this story the entire time

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

A familiar voice came through over the phone. "Is this professor Watson?"

"Uh... Yeah?"

"This is Connor. I'm one of your students. Not sure if you remember me...." He did. But he absolutely didn't want to talk.

"Look, kid, this is a bad-"

"I'm sorry, it's kind of time sensitive. My friend- my friend has a brother- sorry, he's with me now. Can I put him on the line?"

No. "I really don't think-" There was the sound of shuffling, some light murmurs. Techno didn't bother finishing his sentence.

"Is this Technoblade Watson?"

"Still yes."

"Good. My name is Punz. My brother is named Dream, and I'm pretty sure he adopted your younger brother?"

"I... How did you get this number? Why are you calling me?"

"Well, my friend Connor saw your picture of him when you were kids, and there's not a lot of guys named Technoblade out here."

"The hell do you want?"

"I'm trying to find out why my brother went to prison. I'm... Not sure why you'd know, but I couldn't find anyone else to ask."

"You're sick."

"Excuse me?"

"I lose my brother and you decide, *two days later* to ask about this?"

"I don't- look. Your brother is Tommy, right? Lanky blonde kid, walks with a limp?"

"Dream put you up to this, didn't he?"

"No, no, he didn't. Please, Technoblade, this is time sensitive."

"...Yeah, that's my brother."

"What, uh... What did Dream do to get arrested?"

"What, you want a list?"

"I'm... What?"

"You seriously don't know? He abused my brother. He's the reason Tommy walked with a limp. He's the reason that he- he..." The reason that he's dead. Although, Techno harbored his own guilt towards that. It was his own fault as much as it was Dream's.

There was a long pause before Punz spoke again. "I'm so sorry, I have to go."

"No you do not. Tell me why you're asking."

"Because Dream lied to me."

"What?"

"Dream told me he was in foster care. Dream- he told me... He told me a lot of lies. And now... I think he might kill him." Kill him? Tommy was already dead.

"...I don't understand."

"I... Let me call the police first, and then I'll call back and explain."

"No, you explain *now*."

"He brought Tommy to my house. Said he was unsafe at home, asked me not to tell anyone. So I stayed quiet. But maybe twenty minutes ago, he led the kid out and drove off... I can't get a hold of them. I have a bad feeling."

"You have... Hang on, he *what*? No, Dream's in prison, what are you talking about?"

"He... Got out. Two weeks ago."

"You held an *escaped convict* at your *house*?"

"No! He got out legally. His lawyer got his case down to six months, apparently."

Techno's head was spinning again. He needed to sit down. Even Phil, who couldn't hear Punz, looked concerned.



“And... He took Tommy?”

“I don’t know. He looked- he didn’t seem like he was there against his will.”

“But Tommy was *there*?”

“Yes. He-”

“When? When did he get there?”

“About three days ago. It was either really late at night or early morning, I don’t know...”

“He... “ Techno trailed off to take a deep breath. Then another.

Tommy was alive.

According to Dream’s brother, anyway. Not that he was a trustworthy source, but Techno would take it. Tommy was alive, he was okay, he was-

He was with Dream.

“You said he was at your house?”

“Yeah.”

“Do you live near Dream’s old house?”

It turned out that, no, Punz lived nowhere near Dream’s old house. He lived in Techno’s city, barely a ten minute drive away.

Techno was grabbing his car keys, still on the phone, before Phil grabbed his wrist.

“Where are you going? You’re not supposed to-”

“Tommy’s alive. Dream’s with him.”

Phil’s face contorted in emotion. Confusion, concern, disbelief, whatever. Techno didn’t have time. “Okay. And you’re going to find him?”

“Of course.”

He paused, then sighed. “Give me the address, I’m driving you.”

Well, it was about time, wasn't it? "I'll call you back, Punz."

They were there in five minutes. Tommy would be livid if he found out about the speeding, especially considering the rain, but Techno didn't care. He pounded on Punz's door until he opened it up. Techno was startled by the similarities he had to Dream.

Sure, he was shorter, and his hair a different shade. But he was still blonde, and he still had green eyes, and Techno had to remind himself that he was (probably) innocent. Complicit to the abuse, maybe, but...

There were more important things to worry about.

"Where are they?"

"We don't know." Connor said. He was standing behind Punz, looking more nervous than when he failed the midterm last semester (and he was pretty nervous then). "All we know is that they left."

Punz shook his head. "The kid didn't even have shoes." Punz muttered. "I should've stopped them, I didn't- I didn't know."

Of course he didn't have shoes, Tommy's shoes were...

Oh. *Oh*.

Suddenly the note made sense. Why it was so formally written. Why he didn't mention Tubbo or Ranboo. Because Dream must have made him write it. That would explain the shaky writing on the back, too. Why it was separate from the rest.

*I'll miss you* it had said. If Tommy killed himself, how would he miss him?

Dream had *made* him write a suicide note. As if everything else he had done to the kid hadn't been damaging enough.

Techno was going to kill him on sight.

Punz bit his lip, glancing at the others, brow suddenly furrowed. "I think... Oh, no..."

“What?” Techno practically demanded.

“I don’t- I wasn’t watching closely, I just saw something in his hand. I *thought* it was his phone, but...”

“But?”

“We’re missing a knife in the kitchen. It wasn’t missing before they left.”

“Which way did they go?”

“I don’t know. I wasn’t watching.”

Scratch that, Techno was going to kill *Punz*. Dream’s idiot little brother, who hadn’t been watching. Who... Who was just trying to help.

“You have a car?”

“Yeah?”

“You go one way, Connor goes another, Phil and I go another. We’ve got a better chance of finding them if we spread out. I’m assuming you’ve already called him?”

“Phone’s turned off. I don’t have tracking on it.”

“Then we make vague guesses. You know him best- where would he go?”

“I... have no idea.”

Techno wanted to grab him by the shoulders and shake him and scream about how useless he was. Instead, he forced in a deep breath, and headed for the door before Phil could tell him to sit down again. “We stick with the searching plan, then. If any of you even *think* you see him, *call the cops*. Got it?”

When he received a nod from everyone, including Phil, he turned and made his way out the door, nearly slipping in the rain. Even though it had let up a little, it showed no signs of stopping.

Tommy must have been terrified. If he was in the car with Wilbur in the rain... He didn’t want to think about it. *Refused* to think about it.

His hands wouldn’t stop shaking as they got in cars and drove off in separate directions.

It felt like his brain was short-circuiting. He wasn't having a full-out seizure, thank goodness, but he kept blanking out, which was *not* helping them look. If Phil noticed, he didn't say anything, eyes focused on the road ahead of them.

Techno's head shot up as he realized where they were.

"Turn here!" He practically shouted, gesturing to the right. Phil swerved, and for a terrifying moment, he thought the car was going to tip on its side.

It didn't. They were fine. "Why here?" Phil asked, sparing him a glance.

"There's a forest far down the road. Nobody goes down there. If... If Dream knows about it..." He trailed off, not sure what to say. He didn't exactly know Dream's motives. "He might go there."

They drove through the forest for ten minutes, seeing nothing but trees and the reflection of their headlights on the wet asphalt.

"We should turn back." Techno said with a sigh. "They're not here."

"Just a little further."

"Why?"

Phil was silent for a long moment. "Father's instincts."

Another minute passed. Two. Five. Even Phil looked defeated, and then...

A car. Pulled over on the side of the road, tires half-sunken into the mud. It was hard to tell the color in the dark, but it looked grey. It... It looked like Dream's car.

He didn't have to tell Phil to pull over, and barely waited for Phil to stop before he was stumbling out and towards the trees.

"Wait, Techno." Phil said rather urgently. "We can't just go running into the woods. What if-"

“He’s here, dad. We can’t just *not* look for him.”

“We have to think about this logically. If we all get lost, then that does him no good.”

“He has a *knife*, Phil.”

“I *know*. And if he stabs you?”

“Dad, *please*.”

“We call the cops. People who are trained to deal with these things.”

“Then *you* call them. And *I’ll* look.”

“You can’t-”

He was cut off by a scream. By *Tommy’s* scream. And oh, no, it sounded ripped and terrified and heartbroken. And it sounded *pained*.

Techno and Phil exchanged a look.

“Find him. I’ll call the police. *Please* stay safe.”

He didn’t bother with a reply, sprinting into the trees with... No plan, really. He was just going towards the voice. He ducked past tree trunks and branches, doing his best to memorize his route so he could navigate his way back, and, then he saw him.

The man. The monster. Dream.

Dream was walking towards him. He was *grinning*, and somehow that wasn’t the most terrifying part.

No, the most terrifying part was the blood that dripped down his hands, splattered on that stupid green jacket, drops of it on his face that hadn’t been washed off in the rain that made it through the trees yet.

“Dream.”

“Techno? What are you doing all the way out here?”

“You’re... You’re supposed to be in prison.”

He laughed. “Got out early.”

He wanted to scream at him, but that wasn’t important. Nothing was important, except for one thing. “Where’s Tommy?”

“Shouldn’t you know? You’re the one who adopted him.”

“Where is he?” It was less of a question and more of a demand. Still, Dream didn’t fold.

“Come on now, Technoblade. You’re the one who lost-”

Techno punched him in the jaw, hard enough for Dream to stumble back a few steps.

“Where. Is. he.”

“He’s dead, Technoblade. Gone.” Dream had the audacity to laugh.

Techno was done with the games. He grabbed Dream by the collar of his jacket (blood-covered jacket. Was... Was that Tommy’s blood?) and yanked him forward so they were face to face. “What did you do.” He growled.

“Me? I didn’t do anything. I heard he killed hims-”

He punched him again. Dream didn’t even fight back, still grinning like a madman.

“You’re too late. He’s gone.”

At that point, Techno shoved him to the ground, pushing him down with legs on either side of Dream’s. He pressed his arm into the man’s throat and leaned down so their faces were inches apart from each other.

“Don’t look so sad, Techno. I did you a favor.” Dream reached a (bloody) hand up to push Techno’s hair back. If he wasn’t using both his arms at the moment, he would’ve slapped it away.

“What did you do?”

“Nothing you hadn’t thought about yourself.”

“I don’t... I don’t understand.”

“Tommy told me himself. You were talking about getting rid of him. Again, I did you a favor, you owe me now.”

“I’ll kill you.”

“No, you won’t.” Dream grinned. “Because if you do, they’ll think you killed Tommy.”

“Where is he?” He tried, again.

Dream burst out laughing. “I can see the headlines now. Deranged man kills his little brother. Attacks ex-guardian. You’d go to jail for years. If you didn’t, you know, get the death penalty.”

“What is wrong with you? You weren’t this insane last I checked.”

“You know, Technoblade, I spent years training him. He was nowhere near done, of course. If Wilbur died earlier, I think we could’ve gotten there, but I think I made good progress with him. And then *you* had to come around and mess it all up.”

“All you ‘trained’ him to do was be terrified of everything. I taught him he was *safe*.”

“And how did that end for you? Is your little Tommy ‘safe’ now?”

He pressed his arm into Dream’s neck. “Tell me where he is.”

“Oh, it doesn’t matter.”

“You... You...”

“Killed him.”

“You’re...” Sick. A maniac. A monster. A cruel villain who Techno had the displeasure of knowing. “Why are you telling me this?”

“Because I can’t get convicted. They already think he killed himself. I’ll just tell them you really snapped this time, and due to your history, they’ll believe m-”

Techno let go of his neck, only to punch him in the nose, right in the same spot he had back all those months ago. Except this time there was no one to pull him off. There was no one to tell him to stop.

Then they were fighting again, Dream getting in a punch here or there, but he seemed to be a little worn out (Techno refused to think about what it could be from). Techno absolutely had the upper hand.

He had considered killing him so many times. Obviously, he hadn’t. Knew it was a bad idea, but now? Now Dream’s face was covered in his own blood, and his eye was swollen shut, and hopefully he had a few broken ribs. He was punching, kicking, scratching, whatever.

This was *not* a fair fight. This would've got him permanently banned from any fighting group, but even then, Techno couldn't help but be happy because-

Someone grabbed his arm, trying to pull him back. He narrowly avoided elbowing them in the face.

"Techno." Phil's voice. Calm, but with a terrifying anger behind it. "Find your brother. I'll deal with *him*."

Slowly, he stood up, wiping the blood off of his hands, before breaking into another sprint in the direction Dream had come from.

His hands were still shaking, and he prayed it was from anxiety and not the start of a seizure. He couldn't handle that right now. *Wouldn't* handle that right now. He would will his way past it, despite that really not being a thing a person could do.

He stumbled onto Tommy. Quite literally, as his foot caught on what he thought was a tree root and he pitched forward, barely catching himself from face-planting into the mud and wet leaves. He pushed himself up on his hands and looked back at what he tripped on.

A leg. Splattered with mud and... Darker mud. Not mud. Blood. His eyes trailed upwards, to examine the rest of Tommy.

At first, he thought Tommy was wearing a red shirt, but after a moment he realized that it was a red-and-white baseball tee. Emphasis on 'was', because the white was practically gone, a splatter of deep red soaking through everything. Techno didn't know the extent of those injuries, didn't think he wanted to, either. There was a bloody knife lying a few feet away, and he had to bite down a gag at the sight.

He looked up at Tommy's face instead. He was pale. The bruise under his eye looked more like a dark eye bag from lack of sleep, and he almost would've believed he was just sleeping if there wasn't a thin trail of blood steadily leaking from his mouth.

Tommy's chest wasn't rising and falling. It stood deathly still.



At the hospital, when Wilbur died, Tommy had pulled out of Technoblade's grip. His short legs carried him impossibly fast into Wilbur's room, and he slipped past any doctors or nurses that tried to stop him. Techno's sneakers squeaked loudly across the floor as he chased after the kid, but Tommy was too fast, and he was in Wilbur's room before anyone could grab him.

He stopped at the edge of the bed. By the time they got there, Wilbur was almost completely unplugged from the machines that had been trying so hard to keep him alive. Wilbur had looked so small, then. Pale as a sheet, and unmoving. His mouth had been open slightly.

Tommy froze at the sight, small hands ghosting the railing on the side of the bed, as if he didn't know whether or not he should touch it. He looked terribly young to see something so terrible. And of course he did- he was only ten at the time.

Techno didn't remember what Tommy did next. Too focused on his twin- his *other half*, who was lying dead in front of him. Chest not moving.

Despite Techno being the identical twin, Tommy looked a lot like Wilbur. Pale skin pulled taut against bones. Mouth open slightly (though Wilbur didn't have blood trailing out of his). Chest staying too still. Even his blonde hair was so matted with blood and dirt that Techno could've mistaken it for Wilbur's brown.

Techno brought himself to his knees, shuffling over to Tommy's side. Slowly, gently, he placed two fingers against the side of the boy's neck.

He didn't have to wait for a pulse, because as soon as his skin made contact, Tommy took a short, shuddering breath, and just slightly moved his head away.

"Tommy- oh- I need- okay, okay, this is fine- you're okay- I don't- I can't-" He stuttered out, unsure what to do as he looked down at his brother's chest, which was still covered in blood. It seemed to be getting worse.

It must have been a stab wound. Maybe multiple, judging by how upon closer inspection it seemed to be two blood pools which had slowly moved together.

Techno wasn't squeamish. He didn't have problems with blood or gore, but this was difficult to stomach. Slowly, carefully, he put his hands on top of Tommy's chest, where the most blood seemed to be coming from, and pressed firmly against it to stop (or at least slow down) the blood flow.

At the pressure, Tommy's head moved slightly again, and he took in a wheezing breath.

“Tommy? Are you awake? Can you hear me?”

It took what felt like hours, but eventually, Tommy’s eyes opened and he turned slightly to look his brother straight on. His eyes were cloudy, but he still smiled as he looked up at Technoblade.

“W- Wilbur...?” He croaked out. His voice was so hoarse it had to be torture to talk.

No... Please, no. “No, Tommy, it’s Techno. I need to-”

“Hi, Wilby...”

“...I’m not Wilbur, Theseus, I’m Techno. Can you understand me right now?”

“I missed you.”

Techno had to hold back tears.

“I know. I know, I miss him too. I need you to stay awake for me.”

“‘M tired.”

“You can sleep soon. But not now. Stay awake. How about... Tell me about him.”

“About who?”

“Tell me about Wilbur. What do you remember?”

For a second, Techno thought Tommy’s eyes were rolling to the back of his head, but no, he was just rolling his eyes. “You should know, Wilby, you were there.”

It hurt. It hurt so much to see his brother like this. He had to be strong, though. An ambulance would come soon. “Remind me.”

“D’you remember when I... When you... You took me to the fair.”

Obviously, he didn’t. He wasn’t there. But he had seen the picture of his brothers at it, torn in two from when Dream ripped it.

It was poetic irony. First he rips the apart photo, then he rips apart the family.

“Tell me about it.”

“We rode the... The, uh... The big spinny thing.”

"Carousel?"

He shook his head slightly.

“Ferris wheel?”

“Yeah. And... And you- you-” He cut himself off in a fit of coughs. Technoblade cringed at the drops of blood that splattered out of his mouth as he did so. “You told me you thought it was going-” Another cough. More blood. “Going to fall apart. Thought we’d fall and die.” He let out what was probably a laugh but it sounded closer to nails on a chalkboard.

“You didn’t though, did you? And you’re not going to die now. Eyes open, Theseus.”

Tommy’s eyes were half-lidded. He gave no indication of hearing Techno’s words. “You did. Two months later. In the... The car.” His expression drooped more.

No, no, no, this wasn’t happening. Techno moved a hand from Tommy’s chest to his shoulder. Tommy took in a sharp breath (had he been hurt there, too?). “Theseus, stay awake just a little longer, yeah?”

“Tired... “

“I know. You have to stay awake. Tell me about... Uh... Bee. You remember Tubbo’s cat?”

“Mhm, bee... Bees have five eyes, you know.” His voice had dropped dangerously close to a whisper. It was harder to understand the words as they started to slur closer together.

“I didn’t know that, no.”

“‘S true, Tubbo told me. They... They’ve got two big ones and... Three tiny ones... But they can’t... They don’t...” His eyes were closing again. Techno moved his hand further up to Tommy’s cheek in an attempt to ground him. “Can’t see from ‘em.”

“Tubbo told you all that?”

Tommy made a ‘mm’ noise in response.

“Theseus, open your eyes. What else has Tubbo told you about?”

He didn’t open them. “I’m so tired, Wilbur...”

“Yes, but you need to stay awake. Wilbur would want you to. *I* want you to.”

“I’m sorry...”

“For what?”

“For mom... And... And you.” Techno didn’t have the time to reply, before he added, “And Techno.”

“What are you talking about?”

“It’s... My fault... I... I killed them... I’m so sorry...”

“You didn’t kill anyone.” He said firmly before adding, “And- and Techno’s fine. I’m right here, Theseus.”

“No... Techno’s dyin’... Dream said so... Said it’s my... My fault...”

“It’s not your fault. I’m perfectly fine. And you’re going to be fine, too.”

“I missed Wilbur...”

“Theseus-”

“I’ll... I’ll say hi for you... When I see them...”

“Theseus.”

A beat. No response.

“*Theseus*.” He tried, again.

No response.

“Theseus, I’m going to ground you for life if- if you don’t answer me right now.”

Nothing.

“Thomas- Thomas Theseus Watson, I swear I’ll- I’ll...”

Technoblade was crying. Had he been crying this whole time? Maybe. Warm tears mixed with the freezing rain and it was awful, but nothing compared to the feeling of kneeling over his baby brother.

He didn’t want to check for a pulse. Because if he couldn’t find one, he didn’t know what he would do. He was certain he wouldn’t find one.

Sirens blared in the distance. Too late, he thought.

He had tried. He had tried so hard.

Phil was wrong, earlier. When he said Wilbur would be proud of him. Because Wilbur would be so disappointed.

Whether it was out of grief, or because he wanted someone to hear him, he wasn't sure. But Techno *screamed*.

He had no idea how long it took before people (EMT's, he realized vaguely) rushed over. Checking Tommy's pulse, trying to stanch the bleeding.

Techno screamed again when they tried to pull him away from his brother's side. Two people had to hold him back as they loaded Tommy onto a stretcher. Someone was pressing something onto his chest and stomach to slow the blood flow. He wanted to tell them that it was too late.

Was this how Tommy felt all those years ago, in the hospital? When they were told Wilbur was gone. When Techno had restrained the ten year old. When said ten year old had screamed and fought. When he made it to the hospital room, only to be much too late.

He stopped fighting. He let the EMT's walk him to the ambulance. Allowed them to wrap a blanket around his soaked shoulders.

He watched helplessly as they cut Tommy's shirt away. He was a mess of red; some bright as his shirt used to be, some practically mahogany. They started wiping off blood, doing their best to clean the mess, though it looked to Techno like more blood just kept taking its place.

He refused to watch when they pulled out defibrillators. Because that meant Tommy's heart had really stopped. That meant that his baby brother was gone.

It wasn't fair, he thought, as the rain poured down, to lose them all like this.

Mom had been a mischance. Wilbur had been an accident. Tommy was a murder.

He wished Phil were with him. Not that Phil would've felt any less lost than Techno, but at least he would have somebody.

But now he was alone. So terribly, horribly alone. Sitting in the back of an ambulance filled with strangers and his now-dead brother.

The dread he was feeling really helped him tune everything out. The sounds of people rushing around, loud talking, beeping, and other sounds he didn't want to think about. Until someone shouted.

“We have a heartbeat!”

## Chapter End Notes

can't update over the weekend so i'm dropping this now because i'm not cruel enough to make you wait until monday. you're welcome /lh

# you're safe

## Chapter Notes

oo slightly longer chapter for today

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Tommy.” The voice echoed into the nothingness that surrounded him.

“Technoblade?” He looked to find the source, but nothing was there.

A familiar laugh. It was lighter than he remembered. “No, not quite.”

“This... This isn’t real.”

Another laugh, though less joy this time. “No, it’s not.”

“I’m dreaming.”

“Of course. Wilbur’s dead, after all.”

“I know. Am I dead, too?”

Wilbur hummed in thought. “Do dead people dream?”

“I don’t know, I’ve never died.”

"Then I guess we won't know."

He longed to see anything in the darkness. He wanted to see Wilbur desperately, but all it was was a dark void.

"I missed you, Wilby."

"I know. I missed you, too."

"Why can't I see you?"

"I'm not sure. Maybe because you aren't fully dead yet?"

"I... I'm pretty dead, Wilbur."

"Are you sure?"

He *thought* he was sure, until he heard a quiet beeping from somewhere. It sounded like... A heart monitor?

"I'm *dying*." He said, firmly, putting emphasis on the second syllable.

"There it is."

"Do I get to see you when I die?"

Though he couldn't currently see Wilbur, he was sure the man shrugged. "You want to die?"

"I just... I missed you. You were the only guardian who was actually good to me."

Wilbur's laughter echoed in an unsettling, unnatural way. "Come on, really? After all big-brother-Technoblade has done for you?"

"He wants me to be you. I don't want to be."

"Come on, Toms." He laughed again. It wasn't mocking, but it wasn't out of humor, either.

"Do you really believe that?"

"He gave me your guitar, you know."

"Good. I would think it deserves to be played."

If Tommy could cry, he would have. Maybe he was and just couldn't feel it. "I missed you."

"You said that already."

"But I *really* missed you."

"Yeah."

"Techno does, too. And Phil. Schlatt not so much, but he's weird, so..."

"They'll miss you, too, don't you think?"

Tommy frowned, slightly taken aback by that.



“What?”

“They’ll miss you. If you die.”

“No, they won’t. They don’t want me. Never have.”

“Come on, man. Dream lied to you. He abused you for years. Techno said so.”

“Techno could be wrong.”

“He isn’t, though. You know that.”

“I... No.”

He could hear the smile in Wilbur’s voice. “You’re a stubborn child, aren’t you?”

“I’m not a child!”

“Child! Child!” Wilbur started shouting, accusingly.

Their voices started overlapping as they tried to yell over each other.

“I am not a stupid child! I am a big man, how dare you-”

“Child, child, look at Tommy, such a small child-”

“You are a *stupid* old man, that’s all you are-”

“The baby’s trying to talk-”

“Old man, if you were here right now I’d punch you in the face, and then... Then...” He was running out of breath. And insults.

They stood there for an inordinate amount of time.

“Techno would be devastated, you know. If you died. As would Phil- especially after he *just* started reconnecting with you. And don’t get me started on Tubbo and Ranboo. I bet they were already heartbroken after learning about your note. Assuming Techno told them, anyway.”

“I’m not... What if you’re wrong?”

“Come on, Tommy. Clearly you *want* to live. You wouldn’t be dreaming this if you didn’t.”

“But what about-”

“You can worry about that later. First, you have to wake up.”

“I guess you’re right. Can’t really dispute you, anyway. Do you really think Techno would miss me?”

He waited, but there was no response.

“Wilbur?”

Still, nothing.

“Will?”

A beat.

“Wilby?”

Except it was difficult to say that name. It came out as more of a mumble than anything else, and it physically hurt to say.

Suddenly, he was aware of too many sensations at once. A scratchy blanket, something sharp poking into his arm, thick socks on his feet, something wrapped around his torso, loud beeping, and...

Familiar voices.

“I think you’re hearing things. Ooh, hearing voices. Maybe you’re going crazy.” The voice was teasing, light, and painfully familiar. It was that kid who lived across the hallway. His best friend. His Tubbo.

“I’m not. He said something, I swear.” A deeper voice, slightly more urgent. His other best friend (or archenemy, if you asked). Ranboo.

“I didn’t hear it.”

“That’s because you were busy talking about Grey’s Anatomy.”

“It’s a good show! Incredibly accurate, and well written.”

“Doesn’t that show have like thirty seasons?”

Tommy opened his eyes. Er, tried to, anyway. He was squinting heavily in the bright light of what he assumed to be a hospital room. His brain felt too blurry to really register that fact, though, which is why he wasn’t particularly bothered about it.

“Only seventeen. And, besides, you- oh, wait, I see what you were saying.”

Tommy couldn’t even see them. They must have been off to his side or something, since that’s where the voices were coming from.

Tubbo’s head popped into his field of vision. He was grinning, and looked rather excited. “Tommy! It’s about time you woke up, how are you feeling? Wait- we should wake Techno up, right?”

“No, no.” Ranboo replied. “He needs sleep. Tommy does, too, probably.”

Tommy tried to reply, he really did. But his words disintegrated before they got to his mouth, and all that came out was half a mumble and half just sound. He didn’t even know what he was trying to say.

He watched Ranboo lean over to look at him closer. If he could move, he would’ve shrunk back. “Hey, man, you should go back to sleep. Uh... You’re okay. You’re safe. You’re at the hospital- if you can’t tell- and there’s security outside the door. And, if-”

“And I’m here.” Tubbo cut in.

“And Tubbo’s here.”

"And Ranboo."

"Yes, and me."

"And Technoblade."

"Technoblade, too, yeah."

"And your dad's talking to my dad in the hall, but they're both here." Tubbo moved away, probably pulled back by Ranboo.

"Go back to sleep, Tommy. We'll be here when you wake up."

Tommy wanted to fight it, to tell Ranboo to go screw himself, because Tommy was *not* going to listen to him, but his body seemed to be working against him. His eyes fell closed, and then...

Ranboo was an ugly liar.

When he opened his eyes, Ranboo and Tubbo were no longer there. The lights in the room were dimmer. The beeping noise was still there, and this time he was acutely aware of the feeling of something scratching the inside of his throat.

He was also aware of the pain throughout his body. Well, partially the pain, and partially the lack of it. He hadn't thought about it earlier, but he felt a lot better. The stabbing (ha) pain had turned into a dull throb, and even his ankle felt better.

Still, he didn't think he had the strength to sit up, much less stand, so he moved his head slightly to look around. It was a boring hospital room, with a painting of some kid's character on the wall in front of him. It looked ugly.

To his right was a large window, though the curtains were closed, so he couldn't see through it.

To his left, sat Techno and Phil. Phil's head was tipped back, and his hat had been pulled over his face. He was snoring lightly. Techno's head leaned against Phil's shoulder. His eyes were closed, but he didn't look to be asleep.

"Psst, Techno." Tommy tried to whisper, but his throat caught on the first syllable, and next thing he knew, he was coughing terribly. He squeezed his eyes shut tightly, bringing an arm to his chest to try and help the coughing. He was about to start hitting his chest, when a large, warm hand took hold of his own hand.

“Deep breaths, Tommy. You’re okay.” Technoblade? It had to be. He’d know that deep, monotone voice of his brother anywhere.

After a few more painful seconds of coughing, Tommy finally managed to catch his breath.

“It’s going to be hard to talk for a while. You had a tube down your throat for a few days.”

Tube? Down his throat? For *days*? He felt like he was out for hours, not days. There was no way-

“Again, deep breaths. You’re alright. You’re safe.”

He knew he was safe. He was... Where was he? Not Punz’s house. Not Technoblade’s apartment. He was... Oh, that’s right. Hospital. Because Dream had... Right, yeah.

He opened his eyes again and looked up at Techno. Geez, his brother looked terrible. He was pale, his hair was tangled and falling loosely over his shoulders. It was longer than Tommy remembered, but maybe that was just because it was usually pulled up. Glasses hung down on a chain around Techno’s neck, resting against a stained sweatshirt that Tommy was almost positive Techno hadn’t changed out of in days.

“You look-” Tommy croaked out. Geez, his voice sounded terrible. “You look like crap.”

Techno just smiled and rolled his eyes. “Get a mirror, kid.”

Tommy stuck his tongue out in response. He let go of Technoblade’s hand and brought it to his face, trying to figure out *what* was down his throat. It felt wrong, whatever it was. Invasive and gross and-

“Ventilator.” Techno supplied. “It’s not there anymore, but you’ll probably feel it for a while. You have a nasal cannula, though, so don’t take that out.”

“”M not a child.” He muttered, moving his hand to feel at the nasal-whatever Techno had mentioned. Oh- it was one of those... Breathing nose tube things. He’d seen them on TV before.

“I’m just telling you not to pull it out.”

Tommy rolled his eyes. “Where’s- Where’s Tubbo and Ranboo?”

“They’ve been visiting every day. Should be back tomorrow around four-thirty, I think.” Techno moved to sit back down, but Tommy’s hand shot out to stop him, grabbing onto his arm and ignoring the pain that shot through his shoulder as he did so.

“They were just here, though.”

“I... No, that was yesterday. You’ve... You’ve been in and out of consciousness for a while now. How much do you remember?”

“They were, uh... Arguing. About some dumb TV show. And then Ranboo told me to go back to bed.”

Techno nodded slightly. “And before that?”

“I... I was talking to Wilbur.”

Apparently, that was the wrong thing to say, because Techno’s expression fell. Even though he knew Techno wouldn’t hurt him (but he had said that about Dream, too, hadn’t he?) he couldn’t help the panic that rose. Even worse, he couldn’t hide it, because his heart monitor (he had a heart monitor?) was spiking.

“I’m going to go get a nurse.” Techno said, quickly, pulling away from Tommy. “They’ll want to know that you’re awake and talking.” He left before Tommy could refuse.

And then there were several nurses in the room. And doctors. Asking him questions, poking and prodding, and generally just making Tommy the most uncomfortable he had ever felt in his life. It was ‘rate your pain’ this, and ‘how is your throat’ that, and ‘I need blood samples’ and a billion other things.

It was overwhelming.

Another doctor decided this was the perfect time to start reading off Tommy’s list of injuries. Tommy was barely listening, to be honest. Sprained ankle (that sounded fake. He didn’t remember spraining anything. Though, maybe when he fell...), a few bruises that had mostly healed, a punctured lung, and three, large lacerations, which was apparently doctor-speak for stab wounds. One in his stomach, and two on his chest.

Tommy didn’t pay a lot of attention to the recap, but he found out that he had been unconscious for a little over a week (eight and a half days, give or take), and he had spent most of that time in the Intensive Care Unit. He *had* been conscious at some point, and that’s when they removed a breathing tube from his throat. He couldn’t remember it, though, and deemed it unimportant.

After more questions, quizzes, and whatever else they were doing, they finally left. Phil had woken up at this point, and was watching Tommy with careful eyes. Techno was back in his chair, two feet away from Tommy’s bed. He was refusing to even look at Tommy.

“So...” Tommy glanced around the room, unsure of what to do. “Meet any cool women while I was out?”

Phil looked at him, then to Techno, then back to him. “No.” Phil replied.

“Oh... That sucks.”

“That’s... Sure, Tommy.” He stood up, putting his hat on his head. “I’m going to get some coffee. Techno, you want anything?”

Techno shook his head. “I’m fine, thanks, Phil.”

“I’ll get you tea, then.” Phil left. Meaning that now Techno and Tommy were alone in the hospital room.

Tommy started tapping his fingers against his thigh. He didn't necessarily want to sit up, but he wanted to see Techno's face. Carefully, he propped his elbows underneath him and-

"Don't sit up. You're on full bed rest for another day."

Tommy shot him a glare. "I can sit up if I want to sit up."

"You're going to pull out your stitches. Then you'll be on bed rest even longer. Is that what you want?"

"...No."

Instead of sitting up, he scooted over towards the side of the bed. Trying to not-so-subtly make enough room for a person to sit on the edge.

"Techno?" He asked, looking over at him again. Geez, had this guy gotten *any* sleep while Tommy was out?

"Hm?"

"Did Dream really...?" He trailed off, not quite wanting to finish the sentence. As if he didn't say it, it wouldn't be real.

"He did. Three times. That's what the, uh, lacerations the doctor mentioned were."

"Oh..."

"You got really lucky. They said if we came a few minutes later... You know what? Doesn't matter."

It became quiet again. Tommy hated quiet.

"Are you trying to replace Wilbur with me?" He asked,

At the same time, Techno asked, "Why did you run away?"

And then they were an awkward jumbled mess of apologies, trying to get the other to answer first.

Finally, Techno just sighed. "Of course I'm not trying to replace Wilbur with you. Why would you ever think that?"

"Because... Because you never liked me before."

"That's not true, Theseus."

"And you gave me his guitar. And just... I know sometimes I act like him- because I was raised by him, you know- and I thought... I don't know."

"I mean this in the nicest way, but you could never replace Wilbur." He said, point-blank.

"Gee, thanks."

"It's not an insult. You're your own person, and that's not a bad thing. I just like you for who you are."

"Clingy."

"Excuse me?"

"That's a clingy answer. All sappy and stuff."

He was hoping that Techno would smile, but if anything, he looked even more tired. "I almost lost you for good. I'm allowed to be sappy."

"Come on, Blade. You know I'm too cool to die." He shot a look at Techno, surprised to see he wasn't even sort of amused. Instead, his shoulders shook slightly, and... Oh, no. He was crying. Just a little, and not audibly, but he quickly wiped away a tear that had strayed down his cheek.

"You *did* die, Tommy. Your heart *stopped*. I know you don't want to treat this like a serious situation, but you need to."



He paused at that. Frowned. “What are you talking about? If this is a prank, it’s not very funny.”

“It’s not. Look, I’ll tell you more, later. I don’t want to talk about it now.”

“Well *I* do.” He pushed his elbows against the bed again, readying to push himself to a sitting position.

Technoblade fell for it almost immediately, pushing himself out of the chair and running over to stop Tommy before he sat up. Tommy’s hand shot out to grab Techno by the forearm.

“Sit.” Tommy said. He tried to stretch his other arm over to pat the bed, but moving his arm twisted his chest, and-

It was like being stabbed again, albeit dulled down (probably by whatever was in his IV). He yelped out in surprise, letting go of Techno’s arm to press it against where the burning pain in his chest was coming from.

Techno’s eyes widened, and he was quickly reaching for the call nurse button, before Tommy stopped him.

“No, no, I’m fine. Please just sit with me?”

Slowly, Techno sat. “You never answered my question.”

“...I forgot it.”

“I asked why you ran away.” Techno said, speaking softer than Tommy had ever heard him before.

“Oh.” Was all he could say. Because he wasn’t entirely sure, either. “I just... I wasn’t *scared*, I’m a big man, I don’t get scared, but... You were in the hospital. You were going to die. You still might.”

“I’m not going to die, Tommy. Seizures aren’t fatal.”

“They can be! But I just... I didn’t want to... I thought- I thought it was my fault. Seizures can be caused by high blood pressure, you know. And high blood pressure is caused by stress- and it’s obvious I’ve been causing you so much stress lately, and-” He started to ramble, but Techno cut him off.

“Theseus, do you genuinely think my health issues are your fault?”

“I...” He wasn’t sure what Techno wanted him to say. Wasn’t sure it even mattered.

“It’s not your fault. It could never be your fault.”

“But-”

“No ‘but’s. I promise, it’s not your fault.”

Tommy grimaced, choosing to stare at the painting on the wall instead. It really *was* ugly, especially with some of the paint peeling off.

“You... Uh, you know Wilbur wasn’t your fault, either, right?”

Okay, that time he knew what answer he wanted. “Of course. I’m not stupid.”

“Tommy.” A sigh, then, “You didn’t kill him.”

“Why would I even think-”

“Do you remember our conversation when I found you?”

“I...” He paused, thinking back.

He remembered trying to run from Dream. He remembered the terror as he was stabbed. He remembered being so cold and so tired. And then he had woken up.

“No. I don’t. Should I?”

“You apologized to me, Tommy. Said you were ‘sorry for killing them’.” He paused, then clarified. “‘Them’ being Mom and Wilbur. But you haven’t killed anyone.”

“They- they both were my fault though.” He kept talking so Techno couldn’t, “If I hadn’t gotten bad grades, Wilbur wouldn’t have wrecked. If I wasn’t born, Mom wouldn’t have died.”

“You don’t really think-”

“I don’t think. I *know*. And- and I can’t kill you either. Please, Techno, I’d rather go to foster care than lose someone else.”

“Tommy,” Techno said, exasperated, “I’m not dying. And no one’s death has been your fault.”

“Dream says-” He paused, the rest of his sentence left unsaid.

It was at that moment that it finally hit him. Dream tried to kill him. *Dream tried to kill him.* Tommy almost died- apparently did die- and it was Dream’s fault. Dream had stabbed him,

Dream was going to come back to finish-

"Theseus, look at me." Techno said.

He forced his gaze to meet Techno's.

"You're okay. You're safe."

"Dream tried to kill me." He whispered, horrified at the realization. His eyes were blown wide, he could *hear* his heart beating faster.

"You're safe." He repeated.

"He wanted to kill me. He said he wanted to help me but he wanted to kill me."

"He's not here."

"He's going to kill me. He's going to- he'll kill me, he will, I can't- Techno he-"

"Tommy, Tommy, look at me."

He couldn't. His brain was moving too quickly, he couldn't *breathe*, because it was just now setting in that Dream had truly meant to murder him.

His heart rate must have gone up too much, because suddenly someone else (a nurse, he guessed), was in the room with them, politely asking Techno to leave.

"No." Tommy grabbed Techno's arm with an iron grip. "No, he- he has to stay. Please, don't- I don't want to be alone."

Techno whispered something to the nurse, and they kept their distance. A hand was on his back, rubbing small circles against it. Trying to calm him. "Do you remember those breathing techniques we worked on?"

Mutely, he nodded.

"Breath in, count to four... two, three, four."

He couldn't.

"Hold seven. Two... Three... Four... Five... Six... Seven. Good."

He most certainly was not holding his breath, either.

"Breathe out. Two... Three... Four... Five... Six... Seven... Eight. Good, again. Breathe with me. Here-" Techno took Tommy's hand and placed it against his chest. Unlike Tommy's, Techno's heartbeat was strong. He could feel the steady vibrations of it. As Techno counted and breathed, Tommy could feel it. He did his best to copy, but it felt like an impossible task.

Dream wanted him dead.

Dream, his... He didn't know anymore. When Tommy testified against him, he still wasn't sure he wanted to, but Techno was there pushing him to talk. But then Dream was the one there for him when Techno was having medical issues. Dream called him once a week just to see how he was doing. So of course Tommy trusted him enough to go back to him. Staying there wasn't even *bad*. Sure, it wasn't as nice as Techno's, but he was willing to make sacrifices for Techno's literal life.

And then Dream... He...

"Tommy. Tom- Theseus, can you hear me? I don't want you passing out on me now."

"I can- I can hear you." He mumbled, hand still against Techno's chest. Deciding to focus on the movement, he closed his eyes. Techno's breathes were steady as a rock in comparison to Tommy's shaking wheezes. "My chest hurts."

"Does it hurt to breathe?"

"No. It just hurts."

"Okay. Focus on breathing, we'll see if we can get you something for the pain soon, okay?"

He nodded, once again pushing his focus on the movement.

He had no idea how long it took before his own breathing steadied out. Before the beeping of the heart monitor slowed.

"I know it's scary." Techno said quietly. "But Dream's in jail. He's not getting out for a very long time. You're safe, he can't hurt you."

It would have been more reassuring if Techno hadn't said something similar to him last time Dream was arrested.

----

The next few days were a lot. Ranboo and Tubbo visited each day after school, usually bringing a card game or telling some intricate story to keep Tommy occupied. They'd stay until visiting hours ended, and usually a little afterwards, too.

Phil was in and out of the hospital room. Usually talking to nurses and doctors and asking a bunch of questions about Tommy's treatment and other things.

Techno barely left his side. When Phil went home at night, Techno stayed. The hospital had a pullout bed in the room (whether Techno asked for it or if it was always there, Tommy didn't know) that he slept in, though it looked incredibly uncomfortable.

He wanted to suggest Techno go home. Just to take a nap or something in his own bed, to take a break. That said, he didn't dare to. Not when, each time Techno looked at him, he acted as if Tommy would just disappear.

The third day of Tommy being fully conscious, a new person came to talk to Technoblade. Someone he had never met, but recognized by the suit and clipboard. A social worker.

"We're going to launch a full investigation." They were saying to Techno. "To make sure that you're fit to be a guardian for Tommy."

"I- I don't understand. I already signed all the adoption papers."

"Yes, but with this recent... Incident, as well as your medical issues, it needs to be determined if you're capable of caring for him."

"That's ridiculous. You can't be serious."

"A child under your care has been gravely injured. It's standard protocol."

"I..." Techno glanced at Tommy, then back to the social worker. "Can we take this outside?"

"Of course."

They stepped out the door, but since Tommy was (finally) allowed to sit up in bed, he was able to lean toward them and strain to hear the words.

“You couldn’t... He- tell me he can’t get taken away. He was *kidnapped*, you can’t blame that on me.”

“There’s a very real chance.”

“You’re joking.”

“I’m not, Mister Watson.”

“You can’t take him away-”

“If he’s in an unsafe environment, he can. He shouldn’t have been in a situation to be kidnapped to begin with.”

“You’re... Are you blaming me for what happened?”

“Of course not, sir. I’m simply saying that there may have been ways for it to be prevented.”

Techno must have been taken aback, because he didn’t respond right away, and when he did, it was too quiet for Tommy to make out.

With lowered voices, they continued the rest of the conversation, but Tommy couldn’t quite catch what they were saying.

Techno walked back in the room a few minutes later alone. He looked just a little shaken up.

“Are you okay?” Tommy asked, looking up at him.

“I’m fine, I’m great. How are you-”

“Are they going to take me away?”

“What?”

“Revoke your custody or whatever? Wilbur was always worried about that, too.”

“No, no, that’s not going to happen. No one’s ‘revoking my custody’.”

“I’m... I’m sorry for running away.” He muttered.

“It’s not your fault.”

“It is.”

“It’s- Tommy, it doesn’t matter. What matters is you’re safe and you’re going to stay with your family.”

Maybe it would have been slightly more believable if Techno himself didn't look so worried.

It didn't help that only a few hours later, two police officers (or detectives? Therapists? Tommy wasn't really sure) showed up to the room. Pads of paper in hand, there to ask him questions.

One of them, an older looking man, smiled at Tommy, but Tommy wasn't really watching.

"I know it may be difficult, but I need you to describe what happened."

"What happened... When?" He asked, eyes trained on the floor. He wondered how cold the tiles would be if he were to step down on them. He had yet to get out of bed and walk since he had woken up.

"Let's start simple. You stayed at his brother- Punz- 's house for a few days, yes?"

"Yeah."

"How did you get there?"

"I walked." He replied simply.

"How did you know where to go?"

Breathe in, hold, breathe out. He was fine. He was much too big of a man to be scared of thinking of Dream. Dream couldn't hurt him.

Dream had hurt-

"Dream told me his address a while ago. I wrote it down."

"I see. And why did you decide to go there?"

He bit his lip. If he wasn't already looking at the ground, he would've looked down. He didn't want to see the cop's reaction to this, and he certainly didn't want to see Technoblade.

"I thought Techno was dying."

"And why did that make you decide to leave?"

"Because... because I was the one killing him." He whispered.

“What led you to that conclusion?”

Another deep breath. “I cause stress. Stress causes high blood pressure. High blood pressure causes seizures.”

Techno made a sound at that. It sounded somewhat like a scoff, but he wasn’t sure.

The cop ignored him. “And you came to that conclusion on your own?”

His first instinct was to lie. But... Why? Why would he lie for Dream, after *everything* the man had done to him? Still, the words caught in his throat as he thought about them. “Dream mentioned it. I was still the one who figured it out, but he made me realize.”

Techno cut in. “You know that’s not true, right?”

Tommy grimaced. He didn’t reply to that.

“That’s alright, Tommy. So you went to him on your own choice?”

“Yeah.”

“Did you ever try to leave, and he wouldn’t let you?”

“No.” He paused, then added, “I never tried to leave, though, so I don’t know.”

Techno cut in. “Wait, what about your shoes?”

“What about them?”

“The police found your shoes by a river. You put them there?”

Tommy shook his head, quickly. “I didn’t. I didn’t even know they were there- Dream must have put them there.”

The officer quickly wrote something down on his pad of paper. “You left a note before you left, didn’t you? Were you the one to write it?”

“I was. He- Dream- told me what to say, but I wrote it.”

“Did he hurt you at all when you were staying with him?”

“No, no. He got a little angry sometimes, but there were no punishments. I... I thought it was weird, but I didn’t... I should’ve questioned it. But I didn’t.”

“I see. Let’s skip ahead to the night of the incident, then. What happened?”



He glanced at Techno, just for a moment, to gauge his expression. It was passive, though there was thinly veiled anger beneath it. Tommy prayed it wasn't directed at him. "I... Brought up Technoblade. I was talking about him- and Dream doesn't really like me to talk about my family. Even when I first moved in with him- back when I was ten- he got upset with me for talking about Wilbur. So I should've known and not mentioned it."

"You should always be able to talk about your family. What happened when you talked about him?"

"Dream got angry at me. He took me to the car and... And..." His breathing picked up again.

Dream had tried to kill him. Dream had tried to kill him. Dream had tried-

Techno was next to him in a moment, a warm hand on his back. He was whispering something calming into Tommy's ear, though he couldn't quite make out the words.

"It was raining. I wasn't really paying attention to the drive. But then- then-" He took what could only be described as a gasp of air. He didn't want to explain, but he knew it was important to. "We were in the forest. He led me away from the road, uh, into the trees."

"And what happened next?"

That was the thing, wasn't it? He didn't know.

"I don't... I'm sorry, I'm not sure." He finally said. "I remember... He had a knife. And he... I don't remember what he was saying."

That was a partial lie.

He didn't remember specifics, but he knew Dream was telling him he deserved to die. He remembered Dream saying he should've died with... With Wilbur. He didn't want to think about that, though.

"Don't worry, it's completely normal to not remember everything." He wasn't sure how reassuring that was supposed to be, but it was clear the cop was trying. "Just tell me what you

can.”

“He... Uh... He punched me. I tried to run, but I don’t think I got very far.”

“Anything after that?”

He was quiet for a long moment. “I remember being in pain. And then I woke up in the hospital.”

“I see.”

Finally, he looked up to meet the officer’s eyes. “Is that all you needed to know?”

“It is. Thank you so much for talking about this, Thomas. I know it can be scary.”

“Oh, I wasn’t scared. I’m a big man, I’m not scared of anything.”

The officer chuckled and stood up. “Of course.” He was halfway through the door before Tommy stopped him.

“You don’t have to question Techno?”

“We’ve already questioned him. If we need more information from either of you, we’ll get in contact, okay?”

“Okay.”

Techno made sure to steer conversations away from Dream after that. Although Tommy hated the pity, he couldn’t help but feel a little grateful, too.

----

“Tubbo.”

“Tommy.”

“Tubbo.”

“Tommy.”

“*Tubbo*.”

“What?”

“I’m bored.”

It was week two of Tommy being stuck in the hospital. Or, week two of him being *awake* and stuck in the hospital, as this was technically his third week of being *in* it. He was bored out of his mind. The list of things he wasn’t allowed to do was a mile long, including, but not limited to:

No walking.

No standing up.

No yelling.

No shouting.

No pranks.

No sudden movements (even though he’d gotten his stitches out a day ago)

“We can play tic-tac-toe again.” Tubbo suggested. He was sprawled across Tommy’s bed, practically on top of Tommy. Contrasting that, Ranboo sat on the end of the bed, careful not to touch him.

“I hate tic-tac-toe.”

“You’re only saying that because you always lose.”

“I am *not*! I’m just saying it’s boring.”

“What about hangman?” Ranboo suggested.

Tommy and Tubbo both replied “no” at the same time.

Tommy looked around the room, searching for anything that could be listening in. Techno had finally left Tommy’s side, having to take care of some things outside of the hospital. Phil was with Techno. Which left Tommy, Tubbo, and Ranboo alone together. It was a direct recipe for chaos.

“I want to go on an adventure.” Tommy stated, pushing himself to a sitting position, forcing Tubbo to move a little to the side.

“You’re not supposed to leave the hospital. Or your room.” Tubbo said.

“You’re not even supposed to walk.” Ranboo chimed in. Traitor. Were they really ganging up on him now?

“There’s a wheelchair around here, isn’t there?” Tommy said. Of course there was- it had been there since Tommy first woke up. Technically they weren’t supposed to use it without adult supervision, but who was there to stop them? No one. “And who said we’d leave the hospital? Not me.”

Tubbo glanced at the wheelchair, then at Tommy. “We *could* go get food from the cafeteria...”

“See? An adventure. Let’s go.”

Tommy swung his legs over the side of the bed, careful not to move too quickly. Ranboo had already grabbed the wheelchair, despite muttering about how bad of an idea this was.

“It’s fine, ‘Boo.” Tubbo reassured. He was standing, too, trying to figure out the best way to pick Tommy up to maneuver him into the chair. “We’ll be in and out so fast. There’s no way we’ll get caught.”

They got caught within ten minutes. Maybe if they hadn’t sat down to eat, they would’ve been fine, but he was so bored of the hospital room that he had managed to convince Tubbo and Ranboo to let him eat in the cafeteria.

Techno had come back early, and wasn’t happy to find the hospital room empty. Apparently he had only asked one or two people before he found someone who had seen three noisy children, one in a wheelchair, speeding off in the direction of the cafeteria.

He wasn’t scared of the punishment- he wasn’t, he was *not*. He had barely broken any rules, and-

Oh.

Techno hadn’t ended up being angry. He had even let Tommy hang out in the cafeteria for a few minutes longer before bringing them all back to the room. Techno had (surprisingly softly) explained to him why he needed to stay in his hospital room- or at least let someone know he was leaving- but understood why he left.

He vaguely wondered how many times he would be allowed to run off before Techno actually got angry. Maybe he never would.

Dream was in jail, he learned. The only reason he wasn’t in prison yet was because they were still waiting on a trial. According to Techno, they had high chances of convicting him of kidnapping and attempted murder. He’d be in jail for twenty years, maybe more.

Technoblade said that Dream had manipulated him into running away. That even if Tommy had technically left on his own accord, it was Dream who made him decide to leave in the first place- through lies, he said.

Tommy didn't believe it.

He didn't want to think about it, either.

It was a bad way of coping, he knew, but it was easier.

Everything had been so difficult lately. Techno being in the hospital, then going back with Dream, then waking up in the hospital himself. It was a lot.

So for now, lying in the bed once again, with Ranboo and Tubbo sitting on the edges, and Techno sitting on a chair next to him, it was nice. It was good.

He had been through a lot these last few weeks. They all have.

But now?

Maybe it would be okay.

## Chapter End Notes

when they take 13 chapters to get to the comfort part of your hurt/comfort fic, and even then it's still laced with sadness

## **i think it's just one of those things (epilogue)**

### Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The first time Technoblade had met Tommy, it had been five minutes after their mother passed away. Techno had decided from that moment on that he wanted nothing to do with the child. Even when he stared down at the tiny newborn, he felt nothing for the kid.

When Tommy was ten, and it was the day Wilbur passed, he still didn't want him. Techno was... Angry. He really was, though he hated to admit it. He had lost his mother and his twin. He was angry and grieving and he didn't want to deal with an annoying kid running around his house. So he let Dream take him in without much question.

And then Tommy turned fourteen.

Techno had told Dream that no, he hadn't seen Tommy, and to stop asking, because it was ridiculous for a child to walk over a hundred miles to an estranged family member. And then the fourteen year old showed up in his office, hunched underneath his desk wearing Techno's own jacket. Sometimes Techno could still see his shivering form, the bruise on his cheek, and the dried blood on his forehead.

Tommy had come to Technoblade switching wildly back and forth between begging for help and refusing it. And then, after months of struggle, Technoblade managed to get Tommy out of Dream's custody. He had managed to adopt him.

There were more battles after that, and Techno knew they would have to face them eventually, but at the moment, it felt too fresh. Even if it had been nearly a year ago.

Now, Tommy was nearly sixteen.

"It's your turn to feed Carl."

"He's literally *your* dog."

The brothers were on opposite sides of the couch. Techno, sitting up, like a civilized human being. Tommy, sprawled across the rest of it, feet dangerously close to kicking Technoblade in the side. Tommy had shot up in height over the year, going from maybe five-foot-nine to six-foot-one. He was still a beanpole, but at least now he was a healthy weight.

“I can’t get up to feed him if he’s on top of me.” The dog was currently settled on Techno’s lap, practically crushing his legs. Techno loved the dog, but Carl seemed to always forget that he was much too big to be a lap dog.

“I fed him last time.” Tommy whined, extending his good leg to lightly kick Techno, who in turn, feigned hurt.

“You did *not* feed him last time. *I* did. You were at Ranboo and Tubbo’s, remember?”

“You can just take him off your lap, you know. If he’s such a well-trained dog, he should do what you say.”

“He’s off-duty.”

Carl was a behemoth of a dog. When Tommy first saw him, he referred to it as a miniature horse.

To be fair, he was about the size of one. A Great Pyrenees (or something like that) with dark brown fur that managed to get everywhere. Carl was a service dog for Techno, there to help detect seizures, as well as to help with anxiety in general. Thank goodness service animals were exempt from ‘no pets’ rules.

Techno groaned, trying to shove the dog off of his lap. Carl didn’t even pretend to think about moving. “See? Off duty. Why don’t you go get it?”

“Oh, sure, make the disabled kid walk somewhere.” Tommy grumbled. There was no anger behind his words as he pushed himself off of the couch, grabbing his new cane from where it lay against the coffee table. It was cyan, brighter than the last one, with friendship bracelets and keychain charms wrapped around the handle. “Is there anything else you want while I’m up, *your majesty*?” He asked, sarcasm dripping in his voice.

“Some coffee, maybe?”

“I am going to poison your coffee.”

“Arsenic is under the sink.”

Tommy flipped him off as he dumped a cup of dog food in the bowl. “Carl!” Immediately, the dog’s head popped up, swivelling to look at the teen.

Teenager. Tommy was a teenager now. He was sixteen years old.

Almost eleven months ago, Techno thought he was going to lose his brother for good. He thought there would be no way of saving him. He thought the child was gone forever.

He wasn't. He survived. And of course he did, someone so stubborn would never die so easily.

The dog jumped off his lap, and Techno continued to flip through pages of the book he was currently reading. Trying to read, really, because he had been at it for a month now and was barely two-hundred pages in. He could never get far before Tommy and his friends or Phil interrupted him.

Tommy returned to the couch, not with coffee, but with a plate of cake and two forks.

“I asked for coffee, but, sure, cake will do.” Techno teased, setting his book down.

“Oh, no, both of these forks are for me. I’m trying out a technique: one fork for each hand.”

“Okay, first of all you little-”

It dissolved into a fight. Not a mean fight, but a playful one. Like how Wilbur and Tommy would fight when they were younger. And now, like how Techno and Tommy would. Their words would always be light, and no matter what, at the end of the day, they knew they loved each other.

He wondered if Tommy was thinking about Wilbur, too, because he stopped suddenly.

“Techno?” He asked, looking over at him.

“Yeah?”

“I have a question.”

“Go for it.” Techno was still working on convincing Tommy he was really safe.

He *was* safe, though.



Dream was in prison. He'd been charged with first-degree aggravated kidnapping (because even if Tommy had technically gone on his own free will, Dream had manipulated him into going) as well as attempted murder. He was serving a life sentence with no possibility of a lighter sentence or parole. He was lucky he didn't get the death penalty.

Sometimes, Technoblade wishes he *did* get the death penalty. He had never wished death on someone before, not really. But he fully believed that Dream would deserve it.

"I want... I mean, I was wondering... Uh..." Tommy paused, trying to find the words. "I want to visit Wilbur."

Techno's confusion must have been written on his face, because Tommy was quick to continue.

"We don't have to, of course. I get that you're busy and all, but I... I've never seen his grave, Techno."

The confusion fell to sadness. "You've never visited?"

"I mean, I did once. At the funeral. But Dream never took me to afterwards. And I was kind of... I didn't want to ask when I first came here, so I just never did."

"Oh, Tommy..."

Tommy's eyes narrowed. "If you're about to do some pity thing, I swear."

"Nope. No pity here. Of course we can visit. How about first thing tomorrow?"

"Really?"

Techno stuck to his word, and they were there by nine that next morning, Tommy and Carl following closely behind as Techno led them to the gravesite.

It had admittedly been a while since Techno had visited, too. He usually would come about twice a year; once on their birthday, and once on Wilbur's death anniversary. He hated to think about it, but he had been so caught up in raising Tommy that he had forgotten about his visits that year. Sure, they had commemorated him at home to Tommy's insistence, but they hadn't gone and visited.

As soon as they were near the grave, Tommy took off towards it, kneeling down in front of the stone once he was near enough.

They had brought flowers. Tommy had picked them out, specifically going for the blue ones.

“He used to tell me blue could take people’s sadness away,” Tommy had muttered when they were in the flower shop, mostly to himself as he grabbed handfuls of cornflowers, “So when he was having really bad days, I would run around and grab everything blue I could find. Looking back, I think he just wanted to distract me so he could have time to himself, but the sentiment is there.”

Now, Tommy set the flowers in the vase sunk into the ground. He adjusted them a few times before deciding that it was in a good enough position, before he shifted to sitting criss-cross.

“Hi, Ghostbur.” Tommy whispered.

Techno felt like he was intruding on a private moment. Still, he asked, “Ghostbur?”

“Wilbur’s ghost.”

“I didn’t know you believed in ghosts.” Techno said, carefully taking a seat next to his brother. Carl was lying down next to them in a second.

“I don’t. But I have to call him something, and he’s not exactly Wilbur anymore, so…”

“So Ghostbur. I get it.”

Tommy nodded slightly, turning his attention back to the gravestone. “Do you ever think about what life would be like if he was still around?”

“I…” He considered, for a moment, to lie. “Yeah, I do.”

He thought about it often. How different everything would be. How he might not have seizures, how Tommy wouldn’t have a limp, how Dream wouldn’t be in jail.

He thought about all the hurt and emotional turmoil that they wouldn’t have gone through if Wilbur was still alive. Wilbur and Tommy would have been close as ever, he was sure. What he wasn’t sure about, however, was what his relationship would have been like. It had been rocky once Wilbur moved out. They were barely talking before he died. Would they have reconciled? Would Wilbur have been talking to *Phil*? Probably not, to be honest. That kid held grudges like no other.

Tommy nodded again. “I do, too.”

Quickly, they fell into a comfortable silence. Tommy seemed to be lost in thought, but he didn't look anxious or anything, so Techno wasn't going to break it.

However, Tommy was still a kid, and even after everything, he still had enough energy to power a small city. It wasn't long before he spoke up.

"Do you miss Wilbur?"

"I do."

"Does... Do you..." He took a deep breath. "Does it ever stop hurting?"

"Losing him?"

"Yeah."

"No. I think it's just one of those things."

"Like my ankle."

"...Sure. But it gets better, you know."

"I think it hurts less now that I'm here with you. Wilbur being gone, that is. Not my ankle."

Techno chuckled. "Same here, kid."

Wilbur's gravestone was laid on a family plot. Their mother was the first to be buried, a spot reserved next to it for Phil. There was an empty space on her gravestone, too, specifically for him.

Techno remembered when Phil purchased the plot. He had said it would be a long time before it was used, but he wanted them to be able to be buried near each other. Something or another about how family needed to stick together. He didn't quite recall- it had been sixteen years since that conversation.

No one thought they would bury another family member so soon. Ten years may have felt like a long time, but in reality, it really wasn't. Not when Wilbur had barely been twenty-four, with so much more life he should have lived.

Almost a year ago, Phil had been making plans to have Tommy buried there. Not really, because they hadn't found a body (of course they hadn't, because Tommy hadn't died), but Phil was still making plans and trying to order a gravestone and Techno had been just a whole mess of emotions.

He snapped out of his thoughts to Tommy talking.

“And it was a whole thing, but then Techno adopted me.” Tommy was saying. Techno was about to respond, when he realized the kid wasn’t talking to him.

He was telling Wilbur (er, Ghostbur?) about what had happened in the time he was gone.

Techno let him talk. Tommy rambled on about his ankle, about hospitals, about Techno’s seizures and the consequences of them. He sort of skimmed over coming back to Dream (he wouldn't be surprised if Tommy had blocked a lot of it out). And then he was recounting everything afterwards.

How Techno had just barely been allowed custody back once Tommy was out of the hospital (that alone had taken two, terrifying, long months). How he and Tubbo had pulled more pranks at school than he could count.

He talked about Phil and Techno taking him to a fair in the summer. They had ridden the ferris wheel, and this time no one was afraid of it falling apart.

He explained the process of getting Carl, and how much Wilbur would have loved him, despite being a self-proclaimed cat person.

He just went on and on about everything that had happened over the year.

Techno hadn’t realized how much those little things had meant to his brother. But here Tommy was, going on about how he had been trying to teach Techno guitar, but Techno’s fingers were apparently ‘just not made for it’.

“Hey!” Techno finally cut in, “I played it just fine, thank you.”

Tommy laughed. “You muted half the strings and swore every two seconds.”

“First off, there was no swearing-”

Tommy turned back to the grave, “He complained about his fingertips hurting for a week.”

They went on like that for a while.

Technoblade had never really spoken to Wilbur's grave like Tommy did. He sat by it before, sure. He had spoken to *himself* while grieving. But he had never spoken to Wilbur.

It was nice to have a conversation. Even if Wilbur wasn't really there.

As the conversation came to a close, they both said their goodbyes to Wilbur, promising to visit again soon.

It was different.

It was nice.

As they walked back through the cemetery, Tommy pulled his phone out of his pocket.

"It's almost noon." He said, glancing at the clock.

"We should get lunch."

"Pizza?"

"Only if it's pineapple pizza."

"Well, of course. Should we invite Phil?"

Techno hadn't expected Tommy to suggest that. Not when their relationship was barely moving past the 'wary' stage. Still, Techno wouldn't turn him down. "Of course. I'm sure he'd be happy to come."

Tommy was dialing Phil's number in an instant. "Philza! Philza Watson!" He shouted into the receiver as soon as the phone was answered.

Techno felt himself smile at it. It was sappy, he knew, but he thought he finally understood, now, what Wilbur had seen in his little brother.

He'd like to think Wilbur was proud of him. Of both of them, really.

And maybe, somewhere, Wilbur really was.

But even if he wasn't, that was alright. Because right now it was Tommy and Techno, and that was okay. They were safe. Life was good.

"Phil's coming." Tommy said, putting the phone away. Techno had tuned out their whole conversation, apparently.

"Is he meeting us there?"

"Of course. I convinced him to pay for us, too."

"Tommy, I have money-"

"It's about the principle."

"...Sure, Tommy."

Yeah, life was good.

## Chapter End Notes

I've been promising the grave scene since halfway through book one--

This has been. a wild ride. Uhh throwback to when the first story was supposed to be a oneshot and less than 10k words? And now here we are, three stories, 320 pages, and almost 127k words later. it's big a trip

Big thanks to everyone who read it? I know this epilogue was kind of short. I've said it before, but I don't really write chapters to hit word counts, I write them until they've served their purpose

Thought I was going to be real sappy in this, but now I can't remember what I wanted to say... Shoutout to everyone who's been reading this, and especially those who recommended it to others. i keep being so surprised when i see this mentioned on tiktok. also ao3tagoftheday on instagram reads this??? terrifying

Will I write any more stories in this universe? I don't know. I don't have any plans, but I also didn't plan to write a sequel. Uhh if you subscribe to the series, you'll find out if I do ig

Oh! If you like my writing and want to read more, I'm starting a new story! It's not in this universe at all, but it's called "there's something about the soots" and it's Tubbo +

SBI centric, and you should totally check it out

Ok ok I'll stop with the long note now, but I want to say if you have any questions about anything in (or anything really about) the story, now is a great time to ask. Also if you want to throw any thoughts/theories/ideas/whatever down in the comments, I adore those so much you have no idea

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!